

OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW TEACHER'S NOTES

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LESSON 51

THE SIN AND FOLLY OF BEING UNHAPPY

"Serve the Lord with gladness." – Psalms 100:2

I once had the question put to me, "Do you think a sinner has any right to be happy here?" Without entering into the truths or errors which that question suggested, I simply answered, "Is there any religion in being miserable?" and I added at another time to a similar question, "I do not think that gloom is a bit better or more acceptable to God than the most frivolous levity." "Be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance," said the Lord. Let us consider the sin and folly of being unhappy; particularly of rendering unhappy service to God. His yoke is easy, and his burden light.

1. GOD IS HAPPY.

He is the blessed God, in whom are the fountains of all gladness. Therefore that expression, "the joy of God" is one denoting the joy that is in God, even more than the joy he gives. Christ was a man of sorrows during his earthly life, because he was bearing our sins. But he sorrowed that we might not sorrow, but rejoice. He served the Father in sorrow that we might serve him with gladness.

2. THE ANGELS ARE HAPPY.

They are the blessed angels. They only know what sorrow is by seeing it in us when they come to minister to us. Their heaven is a happy heaven, all around them is happiness, their wells never run dry, their sky never clouds, their sun never sets. They do not sigh, nor weep, nor wring their hands, nor sprinkle ashes on their fair heads. They drink always of the rivers of pleasure, which are at the right hand of God. Sometimes their joy rises higher, as when they shouted for joy over the new-made world, or as when they are called on to join in the joy of God over one sinner that repents. They serve the Lord with gladness.

3. FORGIVEN MEN ARE HAPPY.

This is David's testimony, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven." These are a two-fold class: (1.) Those who have departed and

are with Christ; (2.) Those who are still here. Of that latter section of redeemed men we say they are happy though imperfect, because they are forgiven. They are in an evil world, and have much evil within them, many trials, sore warfare, great feebleness, yet they are happy. Why? Because they are forgiven. The favor of God rests on them. They know it, and find that in his favor is life. Being forgiven, and knowing this, they serve the Lord with gladness.

It would appear, then, not only that there is happiness in heaven with God and the holy angels, but that there is happiness here on earth, and that we may be partakers of it. The basis and the beginning of that happiness must be the forgiveness of sins and the favor of God. These are attainable; they are presented to us as free gifts; we are implored to accept them; we cannot reject them without sinning. We see then that it is both sinful and foolish to be unhappy; that is, where there is unhappiness it must be the result of our own sin and folly in refusing to be happy. Let me notice then,

4. WE CAN ONLY BE UNHAPPY BY REFUSING PARDON.

The pardon is provided, and it is preached to the sons of men. (1.) It is a free pardon; (2.) a righteous pardon; (3.) a present pardon; (4.) a comprehensive pardon, covering all sin; (5.) it is to be had in simply, believing what God has told us about the propitiation of his Son. So that God is not refusing pardon, nor bargaining about it; nor affixing unreasonable conditions, nor indeed conditions of any kind; nor making it an uncertainty, or the reward of a good life. On the contrary, he is making it known in the clearest terms; he is laying it down at our feet; he is taking it up and putting it into our hands, pressing us with exceeding and infinite urgency to receive it at once, absolutely, unconditionally, and unchangeably as his free gift. If so, then must not the absence of this pardon be the fruit of our own rejection of it; and not God's sovereignty or unwillingness? We are unhappy, not simply because we are sinful and foolish, but because we are resolutely indulging in the sin and folly of rejecting God's gift, and so of refusing to be happy. A sinner's unhappiness is the result of his sin and folly. O sinful, foolish man, thus to refuse the happiness provided by God; to prefer the "sad countenance" of the hypocrite to the face shining with pardon.

5. WE CAN ONLY BE UNHAPPY BY REFUSING CHRIST.

It is not Christ's refusing us (he never did so), but it is our refusing Christ that keeps us unhappy. He is the free gift of God to us; he, the living, the dying, the buried, the risen Christ; he, the Word made flesh; he, the great vessel of divine fullness; he, the depository of eternal life; he is God's free gift to us; a gift which we are not merely at liberty to accept, but which we refuse at our peril. We can only be unhappy by refusing Christ! Oh the folly and sin of remaining unhappy! Persistence in the rejection of Christ is the true cause of all the unhappiness of earth. You shut your eyes and ears against him, how can you be happy?

6. WE CAN ONLY BE UNHAPPY BY DETERMINING NOT TO TURN.

God says, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die"; turn and live. It is vain for us to throw the blame off ourselves, and say, "I want to turn, but I cannot, and God will not help me." This is not true. "I am most willing to be converted, but God will not convert me," is just as if the drunkard were to say, "I am most willing to give up drinking, but God will not help me to be sober"; or the swearer, "I am most anxious to stop swearing, but I cannot, and God will not give me the power." Whatever, then, the solemn truth of God's sovereignty may be (and he would not be God were he not sovereign), it is not that sovereignty that is hindering you from turning, but your own determination not to do so. Your not turning is the cause of your unhappiness; you cannot be happy till you turn. Your being unhappy is, then, your own sin and folly. O foolish sinner, to refuse to be happy! O folly, without a name or parallel! But in that unhappy state you cannot serve the Lord.

In like manner is it with all of us. We might be always happy, were we always receiving the gifts which Christ presents to us; crediting the divine testimony as to the sufficiency of the great sacrifice, and the freeness of the great love.

Unhappiness thus is willful. "Ye will not come to me." It profits nothing. It does not liberate, or strengthen, or sanctify, or comfort. To be unhappy is our folly and our sin. When happy, we can work so much more vigorously and successfully; no toil is irksome; no trouble or annoyance is felt. When unhappy, all is reversed. Be happy then in God (this is one great part of our testimony); taste his love; live in his smile; then you will see what a wise and holy thing happiness is; and when Jesus comes the second time you will enter into his joy.

LESSON 52

THE BOOK OF BOOKS

Proverbs 2:1-5

THE words "my Son" are not spoken at random, or inserted without a meaning. In them God speaks to us as unto children (Hebrews 12). It is a father's voice that speaks to us in the book of Proverbs. Solomon's counsels to Rehoboam are God's messages to us.

The subject here is the divine Word, its nature and use, with the way in which we are to receive it. It is assumed to be,

- (1.) True. Not partially so, but absolutely and perfectly.
- (2.) Infallible. Not imperious or dictatorial, yet infallible.
- (3.) Precious. Containing infinite treasures.
- (4.) Profound. It will bear searching, digging, and meditation. It has much on the surface; far more beneath. Go as deep as you like, the vein is not exhausted.
- (5.) Intelligible. Though spoken by God, it is quite as intelligible as that spoken by man. A father's words to his child are meant to be understood.

This Word is here called by many names: "my words," "my commandments," "wisdom," "understanding," "knowledge." The way in which we are to deal with it is spoken of under various figures: "receiving," "hiding," "inclining the ear," "applying the heart," "crying after," "lifting up the voice for," "seeking," "searching"; each of these implying honesty, earnestness, perseverance, faith, each successive word embodying some more meaning, some deeper truth than its predecessor.

Let us mark then,

1. SOLOMON'S OBJECT IN THE PROVERBS.

It is good to go back to the original speaker or writer; to remember the instrument through which the Holy Spirit spoke, whether Moses, or David, or Solomon, or Isaiah. This not only brings out better the human

side of the book or passage; not only enables us to realize the words as thoroughly human words; but it gives a point and interest and meaning to them which otherwise is lost. Paul's words are not Peter's, nor John's; yet they are all the words of the Holy Spirit. So the words of Solomon the king, and Amos the Tekoan herdsman, are both the words of God, yet there are differences; and these differences have a meaning. The Proverbs of Solomon would have been equally true, though uttered by Amos, yet they would not have had the peculiar point which they possess when coming from the lips of the greatest, richest, wisest of kings. The royal lessons of this royal teacher and father are summed up in "the fear of the Lord, and the knowledge of God." This is his object, even in that book which seems filled with common life, and its maxims and scenes. Fear God; know the Lord; this is the sum of all that he has to say to us.

2. GOD'S OBJECT IN THE BIBLE.

To teach us to know and fear Him. Many subordinate things, but this as the main thing; this as the result of all its precepts, warnings, facts, histories. The Bible terminates on God, as it begins with him. It comes from God, and goes back to him, leading us along with it. The Bible has specially to do with the world to come, even in those books which are occupied with the duties and concerns of this. Let your Bible lead you straight to God; let every perusal teach you more of him. As was God's object in writing the Bible, so let yours be in reading it. Be sure to find him everywhere.

3. THE WAY IN WHICH HE WOULD HAVE US TREAT THE BIBLE.

(1.) Receive it. Take it as true, divine, infallible. Listen to it, as his voice, his message. Let its words flow in to ear and heart.

(2.) Prize it. It is no common possession. It is treasure, riches, gold, all divine. As such it must be used lovingly, reverently, devoutly, believingly.

(3.) Study it. It must be "hid," laid up, sought out, searched, weighed. No surface work, no holiday work. Day and night, it must be studied with the whole vigor of our souls.

(4.) It must be prayed over. In the study of it we must deal with God. He has the key for unlocking its chambers; the light for showing us all its recesses. We must go to him to be taught: "If any man lack

wisdom, let him ask of God."

Let us notice in conclusion the connection of all this with Christ. He is "the Word of God," and the Bible is "the word of God." He connects the two things together when he says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." The testimony of all Scripture is to Christ; he is its Alpha and Omega. It is through him that we have the knowledge and the fear of God. To know him is to know the Father, and we find him in the word; the more we dig into the word, we find the more of him. They are they which testify of him. Search the Scriptures! They contain life, and they contain THE LIFE. Let us go to them for both. How little of them do we know; how much we ought to know, and might know, if we would search! Would you be wise? Study the Word, and find THE WISDOM OF GOD there. Would you be holy? Study the Word. It sanctifies its readers. Would you be happy? Study the Word. In its words is blessedness, the peace and joy of God.

LESSON 53

THE SECRET OF DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL

"By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." – Proverbs 16:6

THERE is "evil" in the world. The world is now the opposite of what God made it, "good," "very good." It lies in wickedness. There is evil within and without; evil moral and material. "Every creature of God" was made good, but each one has become evil. There is evil in the sense of disorder, pain, disease, sorrow, death. There is evil in the sense of sin. It is this last that our text points to; for evil in the sense of disease, or death, or sorrow, is not to be cured just now, by the remedy our text suggests, or by any remedy whatever. For such cures as these we wait till the resurrection of the just.

What then is this evil which God calls sin? To know this we must go to the Bible; and the Bible points us to the fall, to the flood, to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Sinai, to Calvary, that we may learn what it is, and what God thinks of it. Specifically the last two, Sinai and Calvary; not Sinai without Calvary, nor Calvary without Sinai; the law must be read in the light of the Cross. There is another revelation or declaration of sin; but it is not yet come; the second death, an eternal hell. And yet when it does come it will not tell us more than the cross has done. Men make light of sin; fools mock at sin. At the worst they treat it simply as a calamity, an unavoidable misfortune, a hereditary evil, for which they are not wholly responsible. God's estimate of sin is unspeakably awful. "It is the abominable thing which I hate; it is an evil that I cannot bear; it cast the angels out of heaven; it rained the world; it brought the deluge; it drew down the fire and brimstone; it slew my Son; it will yet set the world on fire; it will kindle hell." God does not look on sin as man looks.

We wonder at all this, and say, Why then does God allow it to remain? Why did he let it enter? Why does he not annihilate it?

We answer, God allowed it to enter, just that it might spread and unfold itself; and yet also that it might at length be utterly rooted out. He did not destroy it at once, because he wished to show its awful nature, its power to propagate, its manifold aspects, the utter impotency of mere creaturehood; and yet also to crush it forever. God at this moment is carrying on these two processes, letting sin spread and develop itself, and

getting rid of it. One great object in redemption is to destroy it from man's heart and from man's earth. The Bible is a revelation of God's means for removing sin. The Son of man came to deliver us from it; and he does so by bringing us back to the fear of God.

1. HOW AM I TO GET RID OF THIS EVIL?

(1.) Not by time. Time cures many things, but not this. It wears the rock, but it does not cure sin. Sin only grows more ingrained when left to itself.

(2.) Not by effort. Strength of human will is no more against sin than the helm of the little skiff in the day of the raging tempest. Human resolution will not do. The enemy is too subtle and too strong.

(3.) Not by human wisdom. Science and philosophy can do nothing. Human skill, human devices and physical appliances, laws social, or sanitary, or political, can do nothing. It is too terrible a disease for man to heal.

(4.) Not by law. By the law is the knowledge of sin, not the cure of it. Law is powerless in such a case. It is but a torch held up at midnight to show the ruin, and havoc, and woe.

(5.) Not by terror. By terror evil may be pent up, compelled to hide itself, not driven out. Neither terror nor force can make a man holy. If not by these, then by what is evil expelled from us? By the fear of God, our text replies. It is only this that goes to the root of the matter. This is the true medicine, the true corrective, the true deterrent, the true expulsive energy, acting both from without and from within: from without, because He whom we fear is without; from within, because this fear of God is implanted within us.

By the fear of God we do not mean the dread of God or the terror of the Lord. Dread may restrain evil, but cannot remove it; it may make a man a plausible hypocrite, but not a saint. The true fear of the Lord, the moment that it begins to act upon the soul, does lead men to depart from evil.

This fear of God has its root in pardon. "There is forgiveness with thee that thou may be feared." Forgiveness, ascertained forgiveness, conscious forgiveness; this is the beginning of all true fear. The want of pardon, a doubtful pardon, a pardon to be worked for all the days of our life, may produce dread, but not fear.

This fear resting on an ascertained forgiveness expels a world of evil from the human heart, and keeps it from re-entrance. It loosens the hold which sin has on us; it liberates us, that we may be free to be holy. The evil things which God hates, bondage, gloom, moroseness, doubt, hard thoughts, as well as love of the world and love of sin, are all detached from us, and we from them. Like sunshine falling on a frozen river, the fear of God dissolves our frozen faculties, and sets a flowing the waters of the soul.

2. THE FEAR OF GOD LEADS US TO...

(1.) Obedience. We obey because we fear. This is the true obedience, the result of filial, happy fear. We are constrained to obey; and yet we obey freely and joyfully.

(2.) Fellowship. Without the fear which springs from pardon there could be no fellowship. Dread keeps the soul from God; true fear brings it near. Dread shuts up the soul against intercourse with God; true fear leads it to release itself without reserve, yet with reverence.

(3.) Love. Fear produces love, and love produces fear. They minister to each other. God's forgiving love kindles love in us; and yet it is reverential love, for he who has forgiven and loved us is so infinitely great and glorious.

(4.) Zeal. Work for this God becomes our second nature. We cannot but work. The effect of this blessed fear upon us is to set all our faculties in motion, to make us zealous men. Slothfulness, and selfishness, and indifference, when touched by this fear, flee away like unclean spirits.

3. BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF GOD WE CAN SAY...

(1.) I fear God, therefore I must listen to him. I am not terrified into listening, I am attracted to it. The voice of that infinite God who has freely forgiven me is to me the sweetest as well as most solemn of all voices. I love to hear Him speak; and I am always saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

(2.) I fear God, therefore I must try to please him. I must not merely seek to avoid offending or displeasing, I must try to please him; and I must live, like Enoch, a life of God-pleasing; not man-pleasing, nor

self-pleasing.

(3.) I fear God, therefore I must give up sin. This new fear of God has turned my love of sin into hatred. I hate sin, because I fear God. He hates it, therefore I hate it, and give it up. The more I think of him, the more am I disposed to part with all sin.

(4.) I fear God, therefore I must do his will. The will of him whom I fear must ever be my rule of duty. The more that I fear him, the more will his will become my rule. Not my will, but thine be done, is what we say to the God whom we fear.

(5.) I fear God, therefore I must seek to be like him. Mere dread would never lead us to desire conformity to his image; but fear does. It is God's glory that we stand in awe of; and beholding it, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

Therefore it is by the fear of the Lord that men depart from evil. Yes, this is the divine cure for sin. This is our strength against temptation; our refuge against the fear of man; our help against every adversary. And what a glorifying thing it is to God when we say that his fear would deliver you from all sin.

And what a solemn thing it is to tell the sinner, it is the want of this fear that is making you what you are. "The transgression of the wicked says, There is no fear of God before his eyes!" Yes, the want of this fear is the cause of all the evil, and the presence would be the introducer of all good.

LESSON 54

THE VOICE OF THE HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOM

"Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away." – Song of Songs 2:10, 13

THE speaker is the heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is his voice we hear; the voice which is as the sound of many waters; which spoke the "gracious words" the like of which were never uttered on earth. It is to his bride he speaks; "the bride, the Lamb's wife;" his chosen, redeemed, called, sanctified one; given him of the Father before the world began; his one spouse, his "love, his dove, his undefiled;" of whom it is written, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." Of the saints of all ages is this "bride," this "body," composed; all of them washed in the same blood, and clothed with the same righteousness.

(1.) It is the voice of love. "My love" is his name for his church. Other names of endearment he has for her, but this is the chief one. All in him portends love. All that he is, and says, and does, intimates love; a love that passes knowledge; a love stronger than death and the grave; a love which many waters cannot quench nor the floods drown. It is in tender love that the Bridegroom addresses the Bride.

(2.) It is the voice of admiration. "My fair one" is his name for her. Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee. The "fairest among women," is his name for her, even as her name for him is the "chiefest among ten thousand." The heart of the Bridegroom is full of admiration for the beauty and perfection of his bride. She is "perfect through the comeliness which he has put upon her." He has ravished our heart, and we have ravished his.

(3.) It is the voice of authority. The husband is the head of the wife; so is Christ the head of the church; and though it is love that speaks, it is authoritative love. "Arise," "come away." Obedience is our true position; and no amount of love in him can ever alter this. It is not bondage; but it is obedience. It is not sternness on his part, yet it is authority. Our Bridegroom is God, Immanuel, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Shall we treat his voice as that of an inferior or an equal; or as the voice of him whom no amount of condescension and endearment, and admiration, can ever make less truly the Head of the church, Head of principalities and powers, the Head of the universe, of

whom it is said to the church, "He is thy Lord, worship thou him."

But when and in what circumstances does he speak these words to his church? Doubtless at his second coming, when calling her to the honor and glory prepared for her.

1. WHEN HE CALLS HER UP INTO THE CLOUDS TO MEET HIM IN THE AIR.

He comes for her; and he finds her in the grave. He speaks to her as once before to Lazarus, Come forth; "thou shalt call, and I will answer;" awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust." He summons her from the tomb; he summons her up into the clouds, into his pavilion, where the marriage is celebrated "Come up hither." He speaks, she hears, and goes up to meet him for whom she had waited so long. "Arise, my love."

2. WHEN HE CALLS HER INTO THE MARRIAGE CHAMBER.

The marriage follows the ascension. She goes in with him to the marriage; blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper; she goes in and sits down beside him as his bride, his queen, in gold of Ophir. "Arise, my love."

3. WHEN HE CALLS HER INTO THE NEW JERUSALEM.

Out of the marriage chamber they come. They rise up from the feast. They enter the city. He calls her into the city which he has prepared, the place which he had gone to prepare for her, the "many mansions." "Arise, my love."

4. WHEN HE CALLS HER UP TO HIS THRONE.

This is the final act of blessing. Come sit with me on my throne; come reign with me over a redeemed creation. Now the crown is put upon her head; and the royal robes invest her. The everlasting kingdom is now hers. She is heir of God, and joint heir with Christ Jesus. "Arise, my love."

Accordingly he shall speak to his church in the day of his coming glory; for then shall the song of songs be realized to the full.

Meanwhile he speaks to us as individuals. As he said to Abraham in Ur,

Get thee out of this land, so he speaks to each of his Abrahams, his chosen ones, Come out and be separate; arise, shine, for thy light is come; arise, leave the world; become a pilgrim; arise, get rid of your sins, become holy; arise, take up thy cross and follow me. He spoke in this way to each of us at first; he speaks in this way to each of us still today; for each day is a repetition of the first message on his part, and the first obedience on ours. Arise, come away, follow me. He speaks as the Savior, and as the Bridegroom. Let us hear, let us follow. Upward, still upward; onward, still onward, is his beckoning. This is no place of tarrying; no congenial air or climate or company for the bride, the Lamb's wife. This is not our rest; this is not the resurrection-land; nor the marriage-hall, nor the New Jerusalem, nor the kingdom. We must not remain here. We have foretastes here, but that is all; the Lord's Supper reminds us of the marriage supper. It is well to sit for an hour at the earthly table, but it is better to sit down forever at the eternal table. With such a summons and such a hope, let us not sleep as others do; let us awake and arise, and come away; away from sin, and lack, and sorrow; away to the everlasting hills, the everlasting city, the everlasting glory. We are joint-heirs with him; partakers of his throne and crown.

LESSON 55

THE LOVE THAT PASSES KNOWLEDGE

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." – Song of Songs 8:7

LET us take this verse as descriptive of the love of Christ, the "love that passeth knowledge." It is he who speaks in the fifth verse, "I raised thee up under the apple tree"; and his words here remind us of similar ones elsewhere: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness have I drawn thee"; "I drew them with cords of love, and with the bands of a man"; "he found him in a desert land, and in a waste howling wilderness"; only these three passages refer to Israel, whereas our text refers to the whole church from the beginning, of which it is said, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it."

We might say that the passage carries us back to Eve, "the mother of all living," Eve under the fatal tree. The redeemer comes and raises up her offspring under that tree, for she is the mother of the living; and there this mother of the living brought her children forth in sorrow, according to the original sentence on woman, "In sorrow shall thou bring forth children."

Jesus declares his love to his church, and she replies, "Set me as a seal," not only on your heart, but on your arm, your inner being, and your outer part, your place of love; your place of strength; your place of energy and action. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? His love is invincible and irresistible as death; it is a jealous love, unyielding and inexorable as the grave. Its true figure is that of fire, coals of fire, the very flame of God. Here, then, is the love of Christ! Its breadth, length, height, and depth, are absolutely immeasurable. But our text singles out two things especially concerning this love: (1.) It is unquenchable; (2.) it is unpurchaseable.

1. IT IS UNQUENCHABLE.

It is not all love that is unquenchable; but this is. It is love forevermore.

Beyond a father's, or a mother's, or a brother's, or a sister's, or a lover's love, is this great love of Christ; the one and only love that passes

knowledge; the one love that nothing in heaven, or earth, or hell is able to extinguish or cool; the one love whose dimensions are beyond all measure. It is here spoken of as a thing of fire; and of it as such it is affirmed that "waters," "many waters" (Psa. 69:1-2) cannot quench it; as a thing of life which the floods cannot drown (Psa. 69:15; Psa. 93:3).

(1.) The waters of shame and suffering sought to quench and drown it. They would have hindered its outflowing, and come (like Peter) between the Savior and the cross; but this love refused to be arrested on its way to Calvary; it would not be either quenched or drowned. Herein was love! It overleaped all the barriers in its way; it refused to be extinguished or drowned. Its fire would not be quenched, its life would not be drowned.

(2.) The waters of death sought to quench it. Their waves and billows went over him. The grave sought to cool or quench it; but it proved itself stronger than death. Neither death nor the grave could alter or weaken it. It came out of both as strong as before. Love defied death, and overcame it.

(3.) The waters of our unworthiness could not quench nor drown love. In general we find love drawing to the loveable; and when anything unbecoming occurs, withdrawing from its object. Not so here. All our unfitness and unloveableness could not quench nor drown his love. It clung to the unlovely, and refused to be torn away.

(4.) The waters of our long rejection sought to quench it. After that the gospel had showed us that personal unworthiness could not arrest the love of Christ, we continued to reject him and his love. Yet his love surmounted this unbelief, and survived this rejection. In spite of all it remained unquenched.

(5.) The waters of our daily inconsistency sought to quench it. Even after we have believed, we are constantly coming short. Ah what inconsistencies, coldness, backslidings, lukewarmness, doubtings, worldliness, and the like, are daily flowing over this love to quench its fire and drown its life! Yet it survives all; it remains unquenched and unquenchable.

All these infinite evils in us are like "waters," "many waters"; like "floods"; torrents of sin, waves and billows of evil, all constantly laboring to quench and drown the love of Christ! And truly they would have annihilated any other love; any love less than divine. But this is

unchangeable and everlasting.

2. IT IS UNPURCHASEABLE.

"If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly condemned." The full meaning of this will come out under the following heads. All that a man has can do nothing in such a case. Love is not merchandise; it is no marketable commodity. It has nothing to do with gold and silver. A man's whole substance is unavailing and useless,

(1.) As a gift to persuade him to love. Love does not come by gifts, least of all does divine love come by human gifts. Christ's favor cannot be purchased by money. He loves without gifts, and before all gifts. Let us do justice to his free love!

(2.) As payment for having been loved. Neither before nor after has gold anything to do with love. Pay a man for loving! How revolting the thought! Pay Christ for loving! What a wickedness and what an impossibility in the thought! Love is altogether free.

(3.) As a bribe to tempt him NOT to love. Should the whole universe be offered to Christ on condition of his ceasing to love us, it would be utterly condemned. Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ? All earth and heaven together would be ineffectual to cool or quench this mighty love. He cannot but love, whatever may be the gifts offered to stay his love.

(4.) As a substitute for love. As if a man should say to another, a father to a son, or a brother to a sister, I cannot love you, but here is money to make up for my want of love! Would not such a proposal be utterly condemned? Were Christ to say to us, I cannot love you, but I give you heaven, would that suffice? Would not the answer be, What are all these gifts without love. Though we give our body to be burned, what would this be without love? Or what can Christ say to us for bringing him gifts, offerings, prayers, tears, money, everything but love! Without love, what are the riches of the universe? It is love he asks; it is love we need. Love we must have. What shall be given in exchange for love?

The love of Christ truly passes knowledge. It is infinite like himself. It emerges out of every storm or flood. It survives all unworthiness, and unbelief, and rejection. It is this that fills the soul; that liberates us from bondage; that gladdens us in the most sorrowful hour. Love is the true

sunshine of life; and with this love Christ is to fill, not heaven only, but also earth, when he comes again in his glory.

LESSON 56

THE VISION OF THE GLORY

Isaiah 6:1-13

WHETHER this vision records Isaiah's first call to the prophetic ministry matters not. It is either the introduction to his whole ministry, or to a new section of it, probably the latter; the first five chapters describing Israel as ripening for judgment, and the sixth as receiving the sentence. Let us take up the chapter under the following heads.

1. THE VISION.

It was a temple vision, a vision of glory, the glory of God of hosts, as such, the glory of the King and the Priest, of the throne and temple; and all this when Uzziah the king lay dying or was dead, the earthly king passing away, the heavenly King showing himself. It was truly a royal and glorious vision, God himself the center of it, King of kings and Lord of lords, true King of Israel and of the earth, true Melchizedek, a Priest upon his throne. In connection with this King are the seraphim. Probably these are the same as cherubim, as they are almost identical with those described in Ezekiel and John. In Genesis and in the historical books they appear as cherubim, "figures"; in Isaiah as seraphim, or "burners"; in Ezekiel and John as "living creatures." Here they stand upon the train of the royal robe which filled the temple. They have six wings. Two cover the face, as if the glory were overwhelming to them (as Moses hid his face, Ex. 3:6); two their feet, to hide their whole person, body ("their bodies," Eze. 1:23), and feet from the brightness; two they fly with, as if ready to go forth on the errands of this mighty King. Is not this the true posture of every saint of God? Solemn awe in presence of the divine majesty, as unfit to look upon the glorious One; profound self-abasement, as unfit to be looked upon by one so holy; readiness to do the work of God, to go forth on his service on the wings of faith and love.

2. THE VOICE.

It was the voice of the seraphim, a responsive song, "one cried unto another." Their song was, (1.) Of God of hosts and of his three-fold holiness; (2.) Of earth, the whole earth, earth filled with His glory. Thus the voice interprets the vision. It is a vision of latter-day glory, when the Lord alone shall be exalted, when holiness to the Lord shall be seen and heard everywhere, when the glory of the Lord shall fill the world. What a

contrast the state of things thus revealed to that in the day of the prophet! This holy glory was to him exceeding marvelous, a holy glory in connection with God of hosts as King of all the earth. It is the times of restitution of all things, when the Lord alone shall be exalted.

3. THE SHAKING.

The posts of the door, or foundations of the threshold moved, or shook, at the voice of the seraphim, and the temple was filled with smoke. The foundations of God's own house are moved at the voice of the marvelous song, and the house is filled with that which symbolizes God's holy anger against sin (Psa. 18:9). The vision seems to be that of God coming down in his holiness, to shake the earth, and to express his hatred against sin, and especially against Israel's sin, in His own sanctuary (Isa. 65:5). He is spoken of here as arising to shake terribly the earth, beginning at His own temple, but not ceasing till He has shaken all that can be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. When God's anger waxes hot against sin, then all the earth shall be as Sinai, when the mountain shook, and was covered with smoke from the presence of the holy Lord God. The "battles of shaking" for our world are yet to come (Isa. 30:32).

4. THE PROPHET'S ALARM. (v. 5)

His cry is, "Woe is me"; indeed, "I am undone." The reason for his alarm is a new and deeper view of his own sinfulness, from a new view of God's holiness. "A man of unclean lips am I;" even, "among a people of unclean lips do I dwell." He gives the reason, "the King, God of hosts, mine eyes have seen." Thus the nearer God comes to us, the more are we made aware of our uncleanness (even that of our lips, and feel the uncleanness of a world of unclean lips in which we dwell. The vision of earth filled with holy glory, and with the presence of its glorious King, has overwhelmed him. As in the case of Dan. 10:8, and John (Rev. 1:17). The more we realize a present God, and an earth filled with his glory, the more shall we feel our own unholiness and cry out in fear, even though we are saints. We feel the awful contrast between our unholy lips and the holy lips of those who are singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." It was Israel's "unclean lips" that cried, "Crucify him"; and for the words of their unclean lips they are now suffering the woes of God.

5. GOD'S CURE FOR THIS ALARM.

A live coal from the altar applied to his lips, that special part which he

felt impure, and in which purity was especially needed by him as a prophet. A prophet is a man like ourselves, yet God must purify his lips that he may speak. He does this by fire and blood; for the live coal was from the altar of burnt-offering. Thus the blood makes clean and the fire purifies, "the spirit of burning." This application of fire and blood to his lips removes, (1.) his fears; (2.) his personal uncleanness; (3.) national uncleanness; for the fire and blood were meant to apply to "the people of the unclean lips" as well as to himself. Thus the sense of uncleanness is removed. Thus the terror which the nearer presence of God produces is removed by that which assures the sinner of pardon and cleansing. The man's terrors are dispelled; he feels that he can now act and speak for God.

6. GOD'S INQUIRY FOR A MESSENGER.

God's voice is heard; its utterance is two-fold, (1.) "Whom shall I send;" (2.) "Who will go for us?" It is an errand of hardship, painfulness, danger, shame; from which flesh and blood would shrink, as did Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Still God in every age is looking round and asking for a messenger, for evangelists, for missionaries, for ministers, Spirit-called, Spirit-filled, Spirit-sent messengers. The work is great, the field is large, the message is judgment as well as mercy. Whom shall I send; who will go?

7. THE PROPHET'S ANSWER.

"Here am I, send me." He answers the second question first; but he answers both explicitly. He does not shrink. He is ready for shame, for prison, for death, as indeed he found at last. The spirit is willing and the flesh has overcome its weakness. The fire and blood have removed the terror, and made him bold.

8. THE MESSAGE.

It is one of judgment; (1.) For the people, the worst of judgments, hear on and understand not, look on but see not. A hard heart, an insensible and impenetrable soul, a seared conscience, given over to a reprobate mind; (2.) For the land, to lie waste and desolate, its fields untilled, its cities forsaken. This is the message of double judgment, complete and terrible ruin. This is the end of the people of "unclean lips."

9. THE PROMISE.

All Israel's judgments have a promise mixed up with them, a hope appended to them. They are not forever. Their unbelief is not forever. Their land's desolation is not forever. There is a holy Seed or root, in which the blessing lies hid, even in the midst of the curse; and out of this seed, or root, or stump, the future tree is to arise, more glorious than the first. Israel shall blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. Here is the gleam of hope in the midst of despair and darkness. But how terrible the history through which Israel passes to this! How fearfully God avenges unbelief and rejection of his grace! Yet the day dawns at last! The King comes in His glory.

LESSON 57

MAN'S EXTREMITY AND SATAN'S OPPORTUNITY

Isaiah 8:19-22

"Man's extremity," says the good proverb, "is God's opportunity"; but we may coin another proverb, and say, "Man's extremity is the devil's opportunity." It was so in the case of Saul at Endor, and of Jehoram at Ekron, when, in the hour of despair they threw themselves into the arms of the devil. It will be so, as long as there is a devil to waylay and ensnare us. He is ready with his temptations always, but particularly in the day of human darkness and depression. He has special work to do at such a time, and he knows how to do it. God and Satan stand with arms outstretched to receive the poor overwhelmed and sorrowful one; but how often does he prefer the embrace and the counsel of hell to those of heaven! He preferred it even in Paradise!

The picture here drawn is that of Israel, Israel especially in the last days, when their unbelief and darkness increase, when calamities the most appalling are overflowing them and their land. Then it is that when God's Spirit leaves them utterly, when judgments are showering down, when despair takes possession of them, that Satan suggests, Try my wisdom, my wizards, my familiar spirits. They try these, but it only makes the evil worse. They look above, but all is darkness; they look beneath, but all is trouble and "dimness of anguish"; all round them is darkness that may be felt. They are passing through great tribulation, their last sorrow; it is the time of Jacob's trouble. Let us learn God's lessons here.

1. THERE ARE CRITICAL SEASONS IN THE HISTORY OF A SOUL.

It has been tossed fearfully; fightings without, and fears within. Unbelief, skepticism, atheism, uncertainty of every kind, these, like the four winds of heaven, rush at once over and through the soul. It feels itself drifting on the rocks; it turns round, and in desperation tries to face the storm. Like the deer at bay, it wheels round upon its merciless pursuers. Shall it battle them, or give itself up to be torn in pieces without a struggle? These are fearful moments for the soul. It is an unearthly struggle. It seems hurrying the sinner to despair. In such a condition, how profound should be our pity! Shall we be angry? Shall we rage at these troubled

ones? Shall we call them names? No, let us be compassionate to them. They are just upon the rocks; the breakers are whitening over them. If ever there was a case for Christian love, it is here. "Let those rage against you," says Augustine, "who know not with what labor truth is found; with what groans and sighs we get to understand the very least of God."

2. OF THESE CRITICAL SEASONS SATAN AVAILS HIMSELF.

He comes offering help; holding out his hand; offering his own wisdom and strength, or man's wisdom and strength; endeavoring in every way to prevent the soul from taking itself to God, to his Spirit, to the Bible. Anything rather than the cross, or the blood, or the righteousness! All doubts and difficulties in reference to these are started. It is whispered that the Bible is not true, not wholly inspired; that there is no hell, or that none shall go there; "ye shall not surely die;" that science is more noble than revelation, that reason is a higher thing than faith; that the creeds of other days are obsolete: that there must be progress and development. All these suggestions are grateful to the pride of man, and eagerly seized upon. In how many such cases and junctures has he triumphed? Man's extremity has been his opportunity. He has stepped in with his lies and flatteries, and he has prevailed. The soul has turned away from God and Christ, and the Bible, to "familiar spirits," to "doctrines of devils," to "strong delusions."

3. THESE SCHEMES OF SATAN ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE.

They remove no doubts; they only increase them; deepening the darkness; leading on from depth to depth; from error to error; from unbelief to unbelief, from blasphemy to blasphemy. No man ever gained by yielding to Satan, or lost by yielding to God. Dark as the soul may be, it only becomes darker by believing Satan's falsehoods. It becomes more wretched and more hopeless, the more that it deserts the divine teaching and listens either to that of earth or hell, however plausible it may be.

At such seasons God comes expressly near to offer his aid. He never deserts a man on this side of hell. He follows him into the thick darkness, offering light; into the lowest depth offering help. He is at hand in the day of evil, even to the most evil of the sons of men. No man can say, God has abandoned me to the devil, or to myself, or to error, or to sin. Christ's tears over Jerusalem are the proof of this.

At such seasons Christians ought especially to pity and to help. These distractions and doubts that we see around us are the signals of distress, unconsciously held up by a wretched world. This is a day of fearful disbelief and change; men rushing from one opinion to another to soothe their restlessness. Surely it is a day for pity, not for anger; a day for prayer more than for argument. Now the world is in extremity, let the church's pity and prayers go forth day and night. Now is the time for tears and intercessions. To thy knees, O Church of God!

LESSON 58

THE DAY OF CLEAR VISION TO THE DIM EYES

"The eyes of them that see shall not be dim." – Isaiah 32:3

THESE blessed words tell us four things, (1.) There are eyes that do not see; (2.) there are eyes that do see; (3.) of the eyes that see some are dim; (4.) the time is at hand when they shall not be dim.

1. THERE ARE EYES THAT DO NOT SEE.

Of the dead idols this is said, "They have eyes but see not;" and this is not wonderful. But that the same should be said of living men is marvelous. It is not true of angels; it is not true of devils; they have eyes and see. It is true of men; of millions; of the greater part of our race; they have eyes but see not. They shut them; they turn them away from their proper objects; they allow scales to grow over them; they deliberately veil them. O fearful calamity! O bitter curse! And yet for all this, they themselves are responsible. It is not God that blinds them, or veils, or darkens. They are their own undoing. They did not wish to see; they were resolved not to see. Self-blinded, not God-blinded. They suffer this world to blind or dazzle them; so that their eyes are useless. They let Satan, the god of this world, put his hand over their eyes; or bewilder them with his snares and enticements. Thus, having eyes they see not.

2. THERE ARE EYES THAT SEE.

These are they whom God has enlightened; whose eyes the son of God has opened; for it is his work to open the eyes of the blind. They did not open their own eyes. Their eyes did not open by chance. Once they were blind, quite as blind as others; but now they see. There are not many of whom this can be said; yet there are some. And what do they see? (1.) They see God; (2.) they see Christ; (3.) they see themselves; (4.) they see the word of God; (5.) they see the things within the veil. They are not like the men of this world, with eyes that see outward things, sun, moon, and stars, earth and sea, woods and hills and fields. They see beyond all these, that which is spiritual and divine; that which is true and glorious. Yes; they see! In a blinded generation they see! How great a thing and how blessed to be able to say this of them, they see! They have got eyes that are not useless; eyes that do not mislead; eyes that present things in their

proper light and proportions and distances! Their eyes have been anointed with the heavenly eye-salve, and they see! They no longer stumble nor grope in the dark, nor go after false objects. They see, and they know that they see!

3. OF THESE EYES THAT SEE SOME ARE DIM.

They see; but they do not see afar off (2 Pet. 1:9). They see; but it is dimly. Their vision is defective. They see men as trees walking. They are near-sighted, short-sighted. Their eyes require further purging. They ought to see fully and truly; but they do not. They were not meant to be dim. God has no pleasure in their being dim. The objects are vivid and distinct; yet they are seen dimly. In what respects is this the case? (1.) They see but part or parts of the truth; (2.) what they do see is imperfectly realized. The gospel is but half a gospel. The cross is not so full of peace and light as it ought to be. The way of life is but partially known. The coming glory has but a feeble radiance. The advent of Christ has but little value to them. Christ himself has but little of the excellence which he ought to possess to them, and is but poorly appreciated. There is no doubt something in the atmosphere of this present evil world that hinders vision and beclouds the eye; but still, after all, it is the dimness of the eye that is the evil. How many are all their lifetime afflicted with this imperfect vision. How much they lose by this! Their faith is not the substance of things hoped for; it is but the shadow of that substance. Hope is to them a vague expectation, with little of certainty or brightness in it. Their life has more of the cloud than of the sunshine about it.

4. THE TIME IS AT HAND WHEN THESE EYES SHALL NOT BE DIM.

There are many partial removals of this dimness even now; times when we see farther and more clearly. At Pentecost this was the case. At the Reformation also. In times of revival it has been so. In individual cases this has been known. Paul was a man that saw clearly. Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Rutherford, Edwards; these were clear-sighted men, from whom the Holy Spirit had purged the scales and the dimness. But the reference here is prophetic. The prophet points to a coming; era of perfection, when we shall see Him as he is; see as we are seen, know as we are known. No dimness then; no defective vision; no cloudy atmosphere; no diseased organ of sight. All brightness and distinctness. The cross clear and bright. The light and love unclouded. Christ seen face to face, no longer in a glass darkly. Every ray of glory coming freshly from his revealed countenance; every feature fair and

perfect; Himself the chief among ten thousand; His kingdom infinitely glorious. No doubting either as to the things of Christ, or our interest in them. No unbelief; no error; no mist. All the perfection of vision, and the perfection of light. O day of brightness and true vision, dawn! O Morning-star, arise! O Prince of light, light of the world, make haste, end the long darkness of humanity, and cover earth with celestial sunshine!

LESSON 59

THE UNFAINTING CREATOR AND THE FAINTING CREATURE

Isaiah 40:28-31

THIS was God's answer to Israel of old in their day of trouble; it is still his answer to a desponding spirit which thinks its case hopeless and itself forsaken of God. God himself accordingly speaks in his love to such. Instead of taking each clause separately, let us classify the various points here brought before us, (1.) an unfainting God; (2.) a fainting sinner; (3.) an unfainting saint.

1. AN UNFAINTING GOD.

It is to himself that he draws our eye in our anxiety, "Look unto me;" "trust ye in God." He wonders that we should not have known nor heard of him and his greatness; or that having heard of him, we should ever give way to despondency. With such a God to go to, how can we be careful or troubled?

(1.) His name. It is fourfold, and each of its four parts most full and suitable, "God," "The Everlasting," "God," "Creator of the ends of the earth." What a name; what a declaration of himself is this! Excellency, duration, life, power, all are here! Ah, surely they that know such a name will put their trust in him.

(2.) His character. "He fainteth not;" "he is not weary;" he is unsearchable in wisdom. Here is the unfainting God, the God only wise. Past ages have proved him such; the experience of those who have known him has borne testimony to him. Time, work, difficulty, cannot make him faint or weary. Nothing in earth, or heaven, or hell can affect him. He has been working up until now, and is still working (John 5:17), but he is not weary.

(3.) His ways. They are not as our ways. They are the ways of bountifulness and love. He is the giving one; he is always giving; giving more and more; never weary of giving; giving power, strength, all that is needed. Yes, he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things.

This is the God with whom we have an opportunity to worship! Such is his name, his character, his ways! Have we not known him, nor heard? To know him is life; to listen to him is peace forevermore.

2. A FAINTING SINNER.

The object toward which the power of this mighty God is turned is a sinner; one who is "faint," who "has no might." It is the utter helplessness of the object that attracts him. It is not "like drawing to like"; but the unlike. It is the unlikeness that constitutes the attraction and the fitness. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." So the two extremes meet, the weakness of the creature, the power of the Creator; each so exactly suiting the other, and each requiring the other. It is this state of things that shows the folly of those who despair of being saved because they are so weak. The truth is, they are not yet weak enough for God to save them. They must come down to a lower degree of helplessness so God can interfere. Yes, it is our strength, not our weakness that is our hindrance and stumbling block. It is the weak that God is in quest of, not the strong; the weaker the better for the display of his strength. "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "When I am weak then am I strong." It is our "infirmities" that God uses as his opportunity for the magnifying of his grace and power. Are you willing to take the place of weakness which God assigns to you, and in which alone he can interfere to save?

3. AN UNFAINTING SAINT.

The saint is here described as one who "waits upon the Lord." He has come to give up his waiting on all else; to wait on this living and mighty God alone. It is out of weakness he becomes strong. His weakness is not less than it was, but he gets a substitute for it, in the strength of God. Everybody else, even the young and vigorous shall fail; but he shall not. When everyone gives way he shall stand; he shall lift up his head. This is described under four figures.

(1.) They that wait on God shall renew their strength. Our strength wastes by daily use; theirs increases and is renewed. That which would fatigue and exhaust others shall invigorate them. They shall become stronger and stronger. The greater their former weakness the greater their present power.

(2.) They shall mount up with wings as eagles. Many a lofty height

shall they ascend and look down on the world beneath them, soaring higher and higher, gazing from Lebanon, and Hermon, and Amana (Song 4:8), from the mountains of myrrh, and the hills of frankincense. As God bore Israel through the desert on eagles' wings, so shall they be borne. They who once had not strength to creep or move, have now strength to fly aloft as eagles. Such is the way in which strength comes out of weakness.

(3.) They shall run and not be weary. They are not always flying or soaring; but when running, running their race here, they shall not be weary. They shall run with patience, perseverance, success, triumph. Theirs shall be a blessed and untiring race.

(4.) They shall walk and not faint. The greater part of their life is to be a walking. Occasionally they may fly or run; more generally they walk; ever moving onward without ceasing. In this walk they shall not faint. It may be long, but they shall not faint. It may be rough and dark, but they shall not faint. Here then is the unfainting saint, made out of a fainting sinner, by the power of an unfainting God. Wait then, O saint, on God, and you shall know his power; how he can uphold and strengthen you even to the end, that you may be presented faultless before him at his coming. "He keepeth the feet of his saints."

LESSON 60

THE KNOWLEDGE THAT JUSTIFIES

"By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." – Isaiah 53:11

OF whom does the prophet speak? Of himself, or of some other man? said the Ethiopian ruler (Acts 8:34). Of some other man doubtless; of one greater than himself; higher, and yet lower than any of the sons of men. For only of one, in all earth's histories from the beginning could these things be said. Is not his name "Wonderful"? Here we have,

1. THE FATHER'S RIGHTEOUS SERVANT.

"My righteous servant," says God, as if he had never had another. My servant! My righteous servant! Servant is a name of subjection and obedience, yet also of honor, according to the rank of him whom he serves. As servant he is the doer of the Father's will; the Father's servant for us and in this sense our servant: "I am among you as he that serveth"; "the son of man came not to be served, but to serve." As servant he is the fulfiller of the law; the obedient One in all things; not pleasing himself, nor doing his own will. "My righteous servant," says God, as delighting in him; for never before had he got such service and such righteousness; divine, yet human service; divine, yet human righteousness. It is of this righteous servant that the whole chapter speaks. It is he who grows up before him as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground. It is he in whom men saw no beauty; whom they despised and rejected. It is he who was the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. It is he from whom men hid their faces; who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; who was taken from prison and from judgment; who was cut off out of the land of the living. O wondrous servant! O gracious service! What or where should we be without such a servant and such a service! All we need is ministered to us by you, freely, liberally, lovingly! Why should we be so slow to own you as the servant, and to accept your service in our behalf. Your life on earth was one of service for us; and your life in heaven is still the same. For is not your intercession, your advocacy, service of the best and truest kind?

2. THIS RIGHTEOUS SERVANT JUSTIFIES.

He is no common servant. He is the great Judge of all; the Justifier of the sinner; he who acquits and pardons the guilty. He acted as such on earth,

when he said, "Neither do I condemn thee," "thy sins be forgiven." He acts as such in heaven. Our justification is in his hands; we go to him to be justified. In one aspect it is the Father that justifies; in another, it is the Son. He "justifies many." All power is given him; judicial power, royal power, priestly power. We get acquittal and acceptance from his priestly-royal hands. Let us then come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy. He sits there to receive sinners. He takes up the case of the condemned, as such he justifies them, He recognizes all their sin and guilt, and then he delivers. They come to him as condemned; he owns the sentence as just; but cancels it, cancels it forever. His justifying sentence reverses the law's condemning sentence. It is with the condemned that he deals; it is them that he pardons. There was justice in the condemnation; there is no less justice in the pardon. The Justifier is the Father's servant; the Word made flesh; the Son of God, who came in the name of the Lord to save us. Grace and righteousness in all their fullness are to be found in him.

3. THIS RIGHTEOUS SERVANT JUSTIFIES BY HIS KNOWLEDGE.

The knowledge is the link between the many and justification. He justifies them by giving them the knowledge of himself as the Justifier, and of his work as the justifying thing. Knowledge is not here used in the sense of wisdom or understanding. It means that which he teaches them to know. We are justified by knowing the righteous servant. It is not by working, or praying, or suffering, but by knowing, that we enter on the state of acceptance: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." This is one of the simplest aspects in which the gospel is presented to us. There is no mystery or darkness here. To know Jesus is to be justified! The justified man can say nothing in his own behalf; nothing good has he found in himself, in his works, or his feelings, or his character. All is evil, only evil. He is utterly unfit for pardon, according as men judge fitness. All that he can say for himself is, that he knows God's righteous servant, and in that knowledge has found deliverance from the wrath and curse. That knowledge has brought him into the state of "no condemnation." Satisfied with that knowledge (though satisfied with nothing about himself) he can say with certainty and gladness, "Who is he that condemneth? "

4. THIS RIGHTEOUS SERVANT JUSTIFIES BY BEARING THE INIQUITIES OF THOSE WHOM HE JUSTIFIES.

He justifies as a judge; as a judge giving righteous judgment; righteous judgment in acquitting the unrighteous. The ground on which he justifies is not mere grace; it is also righteousness.

Not that sin is trivial; but that he has borne iniquity in room of the unrighteous. This bearing of iniquity was his great work on earth, from his cradle to his cross. It was laid on him. He took it willingly. He was able to bear it. He has borne it. The sin-bearer has triumphed. The sin-bearing work is done. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. The work is done! That which pacifies has been completed. To all this God himself has borne witness.

It is on divine testimony that we rest our belief; and from the promise annexed to this divine testimony we draw the blessed conclusion that, in believing, we shall enter on that peace which has been made. God has given us a testimony to the work of his Son; and he has added the promise, that whosoever believes that testimony is justified. We believe, and are justified. We know that we are so because of the sure word of promise to him who receives the testimony. This is what is called "appropriation." It is the simple conclusion we draw from our believing the testimony. He that believeth has everlasting life. We believe, and we know therefore, that all this life is ours: "For God is not a man that he should lie."

We shall know when He comes again how much we lost by not crediting this true testimony; how much more peaceful, and holy, and successful would have been our life had we believed that testimony in its simplicity and fullness.

LESSON 61

THE HERITAGE AND ITS TITLE-DEEDS

"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." – Isaiah 54:17

IT is of "servants" that God is here speaking, this is the name he gives them; "servants," yet "heirs:" for it is in connection with the "heritage" that he calls them "servants." The apostle joins together "sons" and "heirs;" here the prophet joins "servants" and "heirs." Israel gets this name, "servants of God;" the church gets it; apostles get it; each saint gets it. The dwellers in the old Jerusalem had it; the citizens of the New Jerusalem have it too. "His servants shall serve him." We are to serve as angels do; indeed, as Jesus did; for He was the Father's servant. We are to serve the Father; and to serve the Son "the Lord Christ;" we are to serve the church; we are to serve the world; all in love; for it is to loving devoted service that we are called.

But it is especially of these two things that the passage speaks: (1.) the heritage; (2.) our title to it.

1. THE HERITAGE.

It is fully described in the previous part of the chapter; and in reading it we may say, "the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea we have a goodly heritage." It contains,

(1.) Deliverance from sorrow and tempest (ver. 11). The time of these has been long; but the day of deliverance longer. It is everlasting deliverance.

(2.) Glory and beauty (vv. 11,12). All that the eye of man or the eye of God delights in, and pronounces good, in earth or heaven, shall be ours.

(3.) Knowledge (ver. 13). We shall be "taught of God;" all of us. No ignorance then, nor unbelief; only wisdom ; not the wisdom of this world, but of the world to come.

(4.) Peace (ver. 13). "Great peace;" peace like a river; peace that passeth all understanding; God's own peace; within and without; and

with the certainty that no future disquietude shall ever arise. Eternal peace; in the land of peace, under the reign of the Prince of Peace.

(5.) Stability (v. 14). We are to be steadfast and immoveable here; we shall be still more so hereafter; for our heritage is the kingdom that cannot be moved.

(6.) Security(v. 14). No possibility of evil from any quarter; nothing but good. Security (1.) from oppression, (2.) from alarm, (3.) from enemies, (4.) from war, (5.) from accusations and evil reports.

All these things, negative and positive, go to make up the inheritance of Israel in the latter days; still more the inheritance of the saints in light, the kingdom which cannot be moved, the inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled. It is the very heaven of heavens; glorious, and marvelous, and perfect beyond conception. Ah, surely this is what eye has not seen nor ear heard. Because of it God is not ashamed to be called our God.

2. OUR TITLE TO IT.

"Their righteousness is of me, says the Lord." This righteousness avails not merely for personal acceptance, but for giving us the inheritance.

This is the tenure by which we hold it, and shall hold it forever. Therefore it is secured to us, secured by God himself; not simply made ours once, but secured to us forever. Our title, then, or tenure, is,

(1.) Divine. It "is of me, says the Lord." He gives the heritage, and he gives also the title by which it is secured to us. Indeed, he gives us a divine title; such as our father had not to Paradise; a title not of self, nor of man, nor of earth, but of God; a title so truly divine that we may say, God himself is my title to the heritage which God has given me; for the righteousness by which it is secured to me is the righteousness of God. My title-deeds are truly divine; the purchase-money is divine; the conveyance is divine; the security is divine. One with him who bought the heritage for us, we have the same title to it that he has; for we get it through means of his righteousness. As the righteous one, He was the purchaser of the kingdom which He gives to us. His righteousness bought it.

(2.) Righteous. This is implied in the expression, "their righteousness is of me," intimating that it is by righteousness that the heritage is secured to us. This heritage is more than the mere gift of love; it is the

gift of righteousness. We get it in a righteous way; we hold it in virtue of a righteous price paid for it; our security for it is more than the grace of God; it is the righteousness of God. Our pardon is a righteous pardon, so is our title a righteous title, divinely righteous, a title which the law recognizes, and which the law will make good to us against all who oppose us or counter-claimants, if there are any. "If God be for us, who shall be against us?" In our title-deeds there is no flaw nor ambiguity, for they are drawn up by a righteous God, subscribed by a righteous God, and presented to us by a righteous God. Everything connected with our entrance into, and possession of, the heritage is in righteousness.

(3.) Free. Our heritage is a "purchased possession;" purchased for us by another; fully paid for by a divine equivalent; so fully paid for that there is nothing for us to pay. All is free. Canaan was God's free gift to Israel, so the inheritance is God's free gift to us. We could not pay, were it needed; and we do not need to. All payment is refused. It is so precious that none save God could pay a price for it: and He has paid the price. As life is free, and salvation free, so is the heritage; absolutely and unconditionally free; free in the sense of unbought; free in the sense of undeserved; free in the sense of its being the gift of God.

(4.) Eternal. Our title, being both divine and righteous, cannot be revoked. It must stand forever. An eternal title to an eternal inheritance, this is what we rejoice in. Hence the inheritance itself, and all connected with it, are described in language that intimates permanency absolutely unending and unlimited. No second fall; no second loss of Paradise. No future tempter or temptation. We enter to go out no more. For the church is "the blessed of the Lord," to whom it shall be said, "Come ye blessed of my Father." One with the Son of God, "partakers of Christ," "joint heirs with Christ Jesus," our tenure of the inheritance must be as sure and as everlasting as His own.

It is this heritage that God in his gospel is presenting to us. He points to it, as he pointed Israel to Canaan, and says, Yonder is the glory, trust me for it, and you shall enter in. Israel could not enter in because of unbelief; and so it is only this that shuts the sinner out of the kingdom. We preach the kingdom, and we announce that he who receives God's testimony concerning his only-begotten Son shall obtain it freely. But the word preached does not profit, not being mixed with faith in them who hear it. God's testimony is true; it is a testimony intended expressly for sinners. Shall we disregard it? Shall we treat it as worthless? Shall we make Him

a liar? Shall we shut the open gate against ourselves? Shall we refuse to enter in? We that have believed do enter into rest. How free, how simple, how ready the entrance! It is God himself who stands at the open door and bids us come; beckons us in. Shall such a heritage be lost to us? Shall such a glory be despised?

LESSON 62

THE MEETING BETWEEN THE SINNER AND GOD

"Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned; in those is continuance, and we shall be saved." – Isaiah 64:5

THE verse preceding is quoted by Paul (1 Cor. 2:9), in reference to "the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory," so that we may take it and our text, as indicating God's thoughts of wisdom as coming out in his dealings with us in Christ; his dealings with Israel, his dealings with the church; as seen both at the first and the second comings of Christ; his dealings with man in grace, that is, according to his own free love. "My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways." In our text we have a specimen of God's thoughts and ways.

1. GOD MEETS MAN.

"Thou meetest." Distance is our natural condition; sin produced it; Adam showed it; man loves it. As far from God as possible. Depart from us, men say. So the prodigal went into the far country. Man wants no meeting with God. He would rather that the distance were preserved forever. The thought of meeting God is unpleasant. Hence the irksomeness of religion, the weariness of Sabbaths, even though the meeting be of the vaguest and most formal shadowy kind. He must meet Him at the judgment day, but he tries not to think of this, and hopes that he may be ready when it comes. But though man will not draw nigh to God, God draws nigh to man. He does not love the distance and separation. He comes nigh. He did so in the person of the prophets and such like messengers. He did so specifically in the Angel of the Covenant, and in the Word made flesh. But his object is not merely to visit earth, but to come up to, to draw near to each of his creatures. He is desirous of a meeting, a loving friendly meeting, not of judgment, or reproof, or vengeance, but of grace. Isaiah speaks as one who knew this. "Thou meetest," he says; that is, you are in the habit of doing this. It is your practice, your desire to meet the sinner. This is our message in the gospel, God wants to meet you, to meet each of you. He proposes a meeting. He tells you that there is neither coldness nor unwillingness on his part; that all things are ready. Come, meet with me, I wish to meet

with you.

2. HOW DOES HE MEET MAN?

In love. As the Lord God merciful and gracious. He meets him as Jesus met the Galilean fishermen, and said, follow me; as Jesus met the woman of Sychar, Zaccheus, Mary Magdalene. He meets him with pardon and reconciliation. He meets him as Melchizedek met Abraham, to bless him. Man dislikes the meeting, either for blessing or cursing; God desires it, that he may bless.

3. WHERE DOES HE MEET MAN?

At the cross. That is the meeting-place. There is no other. It is a safe one, and a blessed one. There there is no wrath, no condemnation, no darkness. God stands at the cross and cries aloud, Meet me here. Not on a spot of your own choosing, but here on the spot which I have chosen; here where the blood was shed, and Christ's sacrifice offered up. This is the meeting-place. Two meeting-places; one the cross, now; the other the judgment-seat, hereafter. Which do you choose? One you must have.

4. WHAT MEN DOES HE MEET?

Now in what follows we are not to understand that the class is narrowed or restricted; that he shuts out the worst, and will have none of them. The description given refers simply to the footing on which he receives them, on that footing he is willing to receive any, and all. On that footing all may place themselves, and so be sure of a welcome. Our text, however, evidently does not refer exclusively to the first meeting, but to the whole subsequent interaction, and describes the footing on which that fellowship is to go on and be maintained. There are three things declared as to those with whom God meets; and these three things follow each other in a certain order.

(1.) The rejoicing man. He is one who has found in the gospel glad tidings of great joy; one of those described by David in the 32nd Psalm, a man of blessedness. He has found the rejoicing of the hope; and he holds it to the end. He has accepted the good news, and as such he is accepted of God. God meets him.

(2). The man that works righteousness. (1.) He works, he is not slothful; (2.) he works righteousness, good works; (3.) he works righteousness, because he rejoices. He does not rejoice because he

works, but he works because he rejoices. His joy makes him a worker, a doer of the will of God; able for suffering or laboring. His life is a doing of righteousness.

(3.) Those that remember thee in thy ways. This corresponds with the apostolic "looking unto Jesus." We remember God, we remember him in his ways, his footsteps, his doings, as recorded in Scripture. When we call him to remembrance we do so in connection with some of his many ways recorded there.

This meeting is a life-long one. Not yesterday, nor today, nor tomorrow, but continual; begun at conversion, carried on through life, consummated in the kingdom. It is a meeting for pardon; a meeting for fellowship; a meeting for the bestowal of all love and blessing; prelude of the more glorious meeting when Jesus comes the second time to begin his endless reign.

LESSON 63

GOD'S LOVE AND GOD'S WAY OF BLESSING

"Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, says the Lord."
– Jeremiah 3:12-13

LET us mark here two things: (1.) God's message of love; (2.) His way of blessing.

1. GOD'S MESSAGE OF LOVE.

He is evidently in earnest about this. There is nothing of coldness, or delay, or insincerity. He calls a messenger, a special messenger, for the occasion. He sends him out with, "Go," as did our Lord, "Go ye into all nations"; like an arrow from a bow. "Proclaim," speak, lift up thy voice like a herald, that all may hear, and that there may be no mistake. "Toward the north," where "backsliding Israel" dwelt, and where her idolatries were practiced, as Bethel and Samaria; it is like, "Begin at Jerusalem"; go to the worst, to the very center of the sin and the evil; go to Bethel, go to Samaria, go to the chief of sinners; go to the backslider, the apostate, the idolater. And with what message? The message of love and reconciliation! The chief point of the message is the word "return." Like the prodigal they had departed; and the Father's voice calls to them, "Come back," come back to me. God speaks as one in earnest; as a father; as a father who has lost a child, and yearns over his lost son. "How shall I give thee up" is his feeling; how can I part with thee. God is not indifferent to our departure or our absence. Though he has all heaven, with all its angels, he feels the blank made by one sinner's departure. The sea feels not the abstraction of a drop, nor the sun of a ray; the monarch of a mighty empire does not feel the departure of one subject, but God feels and mourns over the revolt and alienation of one sinner. While urging home this word, "Return," God enforces it with encouragements and arguments.

(1.) I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you. This is more exactly,

"I will not cause my countenance to fall on you"; that is, I will not frown upon you; the words are the same as in describing Cain: "his countenance fell." Instead of the frown shall come the smile upon my countenance: "I will lift up my countenance upon you." This is grace and tender love. The sinner is told what he is to expect from God in returning. "When he was yet a great way off, the father saw him."

(2.) I will be merciful. With God there is mercy; for his name is the Lord God, merciful and gracious. Israel had tried his mercy to the uttermost, but it was not exhausted. Its fullness was undiminished. Where sin had abounded, grace had much more abounded; and the announcement here of his mercy is to tell Israel that all their backslidings, and apostasies, and idolatries had not altered or lessened that mercy. It was mercy to the uttermost, mercy to the last.

(3.) I will not keep anger forever. Indirectly this tells the terrible truth that there had been, and was still, anger against them. In wrath he had smitten them and scattered them. It had lain heavy and sore upon them. But it was not to be perpetual anger. "His anger is but a moment"; it passes away, and he teaches Israel to sing, "Though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away."

Such is God's message of love; sent in truth and earnestness to Israel; sent with no less truth and earnestness to us! Return and be forgiven! Return and be blest! Return and let me pour out on you the fullness of my forgiving love!

2. THE WAY OF BLESSING.

There is but one way to this; not merit, or goodness, or labor, or earnestness, but simply acknowledgment of sin. In this acknowledgment there is nothing meritorious, nothing in itself fitted to attract or secure blessing. But it is the way of God's appointment; it is the channel through which the forgiveness flows; it places us on that footing in which alone God can bless the sinner. So long as there is on the part of the sinner the slightest thought that he deserves to be blessed, that God ought to bless him, that he has done or felt anything which makes him more fit or qualified for blessing, he is not in a position in which God can be glorified in blessing him; indeed, he is retaining that self-righteous position which renders it impossible that God can honorably and righteously bless him. But the moment that he forgoes all claims, and takes the sinner's place before God, as one deserving nothing, that moment he is in the position in which God can and will bless.

"Only acknowledge"! These are his words to us, announcing the way of blessing. "Only acknowledge"! Thus he speaks to us still (1 John 1:9).

The particulars of the acknowledgment follow: (1.) iniquity; (2.) transgression against the Lord our God; (3.) going after idols; (4.) not obeying the voice of God. Just the sins in particular that Israel had committed. It is this particular enumeration of sin that he asks of us. Go into particulars when you come before the Lord. Beware of general confessions. They do not touch the conscience, and they do not reach God. Be very special and minute in all that you tell God concerning your sins. Yet with the full confidence of receiving pardon; for if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Only acknowledge! This is the one thing that God asks; it is the one thing that the sinner shrinks from. For it brings him down so far. It strips him absolutely of all goodness. Yet on no other footing will God deal with any sinner. So was it in the case of the Pharisee and the publican. This was Laodicea's special sin; refusal to acknowledge poverty. It was to this that the Lord urged her. So he urges us. It is our pride that stands between us and blessing. Take the sinner's place and all is ours. Let us deal with him now as sinners; and when he comes again he will own us as sons and heirs.

LESSON 64

DIVINE JEALOUSY FOR THE TRUTH

"O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" – Jeremiah 5:3

THIS first clause of the third verse should be connected with the two previous verses, in which the Lord complains that truth was gone from his city and his people; that even when swearing by his name men disregarded it. Jerusalem had become a city of falsehood; Israel a nation of false men.

They said, God regarded it not. He allows the speaker of falsehood to go on unpunished. His eyes are not on such men or such things. They are of no moment to him. The prophet breaks in here with his question, his appeal, "O God, are not thine eyes upon the truth?" Whatever men may say, Do you not regard it? Do you not abhor the untrue? Do you not cut off the liar? Do you not condemn the one who utters error?

The word "truth" in Scripture refers both to doctrine and practice. It points both to the "error" and the "lie." It classes both together. It condemns both. False speaking, whether in reference to teaching or witness-bearing, is declared to be abominable to God. His eyes are upon the truth. They watch over it, to guard it and to maintain it. The eyes of God are upon the truth, whatever men may say; and that which is untrue, whatever form it takes, he marks and will avenge; the untrue thing, whatever its nature or object, the untrue word, the untrue look, the untrue act, private or public, is not tolerated by him.

The theory of many is that God's eyes are not upon the truth, and that therefore a man may believe what he pleases, and say what he likes, without fearing God's displeasure. It is only when the untrue thing which he thinks and says interferes with human rights, or social privileges that he is to be visited with punishment. God's eyes, then, are upon the truth, the truth as found on earth among the sons of men.

1. THEY ARE WATCHFUL EYES.

They do not close. He whose eyes neither slumber nor sleep. Not a sound, a thought, a word from pen or lip, but He notices. He who sees the sparrows, numbers the hairs, and feeds the ravens, has His eye on all human utterances, all writings of man, books or tracts, all openings of man's lips in private or public.

2. THEY ARE DISCERNING EYES.

They are like flames of fire. They search and try everything. There is no indifference about their gaze. They are keen to discriminate between truth and error. They are the eyes of a judge who loves the true and hates the false. Man thinks whatever is earnestly spoken is good; not so with God. He discerns, he judges, he sifts, he tries every word, every phrase, every thought, every plan. There is such a thing as divine censorship, minute but unerring criticism.

3. THEY ARE JUST EYES.

They do not make a man an offender for a word, yet they weigh everything in equal balances. There is no overvaluing nor under-valuing what is spoken or written. Each thing is judged without favor or partiality, and it is approved or condemned according as it is true or false. The standard of measurement is divine and perfect. No bribery here, no acceptance of man's person whether poor or rich. It is "just judgment," a just verdict that is pronounced. The righteous Lord loves righteousness. With nothing less than truth, in every sense, will he be satisfied. Truth from man; truth between himself and man, truth between man and man; the true word, the true thought, the true look, and voice, and tone.

(1.) There is but one standard of truth. God fixes the standard and acts on it, without caprice, or partiality, or compromise. Error is a thousand-fold, pliable, moveable, uncertain, truth is ONE. On this God calls on us to act, on this he acts himself. So that man cannot excuse his error or his falsehood on the ground that there were more standards than one.

(2.) This one standard is definite. It is not vague or shadowy. It does not merely settle certain great principles, but smaller ones as well. It is so very definite and precise as to leave man without excuse. It lets man know explicitly God's present estimate of truth and falsehood, as well as his future judgment on these. It is so distinct that no one with an open ear and eye can hesitate about it. In our day men call this narrowness, bigotry, littleness. But if we only insist on being of one mind with God, he that condemns us condemns God himself. Let us be as broad as he is, but no broader; that is enough, whatever the age may say.

(3.) That one standard is universal. It is for every age and person. It

never becomes obsolete. It is like God himself, unchangeable; like the Christ of God, the same yesterday, today, and forever. It was given to our fathers, it is given to us. It suited the East, it suits the West. It suited the Jew, it suits the Gentile also; barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free. It suited the Asian, it suits the European. It suits the Briton, it suits the Indian, and the African. It suits the unlearned, it suits the learned too. One standard for all! One universal test or measurement of truth.

(4.) That one standard is the Bible. It is no secret standard that He judges us by, or by which He tests truth and error. The test which He gives to us He acts upon himself. The Bible is His book of truth as well as ours. That book contains what God calls truth, truth definite, fixed, certain, not moveable, nor waxing obsolete, nor falling behind the age.

The Bible is the one book of the age, indeed, of the ages, of all ages. Man's present unbelief seeks to loosen its authority, to dilute its statements, to render indefinite its doctrines. But the word of the Lord endures forever. God is not a man that he should lie. His word is sure, his truth is everlasting, his book is like the sun in the firmament; a light for all ages and lands.

God's eyes are on the truth. It is truth that he delights in; it is error that he abhors. It is truth that he is seeking for among the sons of men. What a condemnation to the negligence of thought in the present day! As if man were at liberty to think as he pleases, irrespective of God and his book! God watches over the truth; he marks each error, each deviation from his one standard.

O man, have you received the very truth, and the whole truth of God? He has given man a book for a standard, not that he may speculate, but that he may not speculate, but believe. What God, in and by that book, demands of men is not criticism, opinion, speculation, but BELIEF. God's eyes are on the truth, to see if men believe it.

The day is at hand, the great day of the Lord, when TRUTH only shall be set on high, and error put to shame. O man, God's eyes are on the truth, let yours be on it too. Be true to truth; be true to yourself; be true to God.

LESSON 65

DIVINE LOVE AND HUMAN REJECTION OF IT

"I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgments of the Lord." – Jeremiah 8:6-7

THE prophet is predicting judgment upon rebellious Israel; he is depicting the woes that were suspended over Jerusalem, like the sword of the destroying angel, sorrow upon sorrow, terror upon terror, death upon death.

Through this infinite gloom there shoot rays of light, as once and again God makes mention of his love; and how brightly do these words of love gleam through the terrible darkness! But Israel quenches all these beams; he will have none of them, he loves the darkness rather than the light; he says, Darkness, be my light; evil, be my good; night, be my day. And at last God leaves him to his doom, "The Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath."

Let us now look at the two sides of the picture the divine and the human, the heart of God and the heart of man, God's attitude towards man, and man's towards God. For what is written here for Israel is written for us. God's love, and man's rejection of it.

1. GOD'S LOVE.

"I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright." He speaks as one on the watch for good, not for evil; like the prodigal's father, looking eagerly out for his son's return. The scene reminds us of Christ's "Oh that thou hadst known." It reminds us of "How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim"; of "Since I spoke against him I do earnestly remember him still." It tells us of God's eager desire to hear the faintest sigh of the returning sinner, His longing to get one word of remembrance from His alienated sons and daughters. It tells us also of God's disappointment at hearing nothing from us, at man's silence, and distance, and refusal to return.

God is not indifferent to man's position, and danger, and wretchedness. He does not say as we do, "It is his loss, not mine," or, "He has none but himself to blame for it, let him take it." No such hard-hearted speeches ever come from the lips of our loving God. He never loses sight of us, he pities us, yearns over us, longs to hear the inquiring voice, and the sound of the returning footstep. And when He does not hear it, it "grieves Him at the heart," His heart is turned within Him, His times of repentance are kindled together.

He is hearkening and listening at our doors, to catch the lowest word or sigh. Each day He listens, He listened this morning when you rose, He listens now! Oh the joy it would give Him to hear from any of you, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Will you not give Him this joy? Will you grieve him by your silence? Shall His longsuffering not melt you?

2. MAN'S REJECTION OF IT.

This is very strongly put in our text; and in several ways and forms.

(1.) The wrong words. He did hear words from them, but not those He wanted; perhaps the words of pride, of self-righteousness, of blasphemy, of worldliness, of lust; not the prodigal's words, "I will arise," which alone are sweet to Him; perhaps the self-sufficiency of the Pharisee, "I thank thee that I am not as other men," or, "We are lords," or, We are the temple of the Lord; not, God be merciful to me a sinner. "They spoke not aright."

(2.) The impenitence. "No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done." Their hearts were hardened. Goodness and severity had both failed. There was no sense of sin, no shame because of evil, no dread of danger. Israel's was the impenitent heart. And such is the heart of multitudes amongst us; the heart of our nation, we may say, indeed, the heart of our world; would to God that we could not say, the heart of the churches. Impenitence! How dreadful the condition of one to whom this description belongs! Do you repent of your ways, O man; do you say in bitterness of soul, "Oh what, what have I done!"

(3.) The recklessness. "Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." He is blind, madly blind, both to danger and to sin. Furiously he plunges on in evil, from sin to sin, from lust to lust, daring every venture, defying God, braving his anger, setting at naught his threats, scoffing at his judgments, rushing against his shield,

mocking at his hell. How much is there of recklessness amongst us! Recklessness in sin, crime, self-indulgence, pleasure, lust. Utter defiance of God: bold, unblushing audacity, which nothing will daunt; which mocks at judgments, sorrows, trials, sermons, ministers, and plunges on in evil, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.

(4.) Stupidity. "The stork knoweth her appointed times." We were going to say brutish stupidity, but God means to tell us that it is something worse than that. Beast and bird obey the ordained laws and keep to their appointed seasons; they return when the season calls them. But man discerns nothing, heeds nothing; times, laws, seasons, instincts, are all disregarded by him. He is void of understanding, he has closed the eye and ear, his whole intellect has lost its power of perception, not only of duty but of danger. "My people know not the judgment of the Lord." Their heart is waxed gross. They go down lower than the beasts which perish.

Yet God leaves us not. He does not say, Let him alone, in the sense of leave him to perish. He stretches out His hands to us, He bends over us, He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish; He listens and listens. As He does at the door of the saint (Mal. 3:16), so of the sinner. What shall He hear? Ephraim bemoaning himself? Or the words of unbelief, and impenitence, and sin?

LESSON 66

GOD'S DESIRE TO BLESS THE SINNER

"Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" – Jeremiah 13:27

WITHOUT dwelling on Jerusalem and her apostasy, which this verse specially brings before us, we pass at once to the application of the words to man in general.

1. MAN'S UNCLEANNESS.

The uncleanness here spoken of is spiritual, and refers especially to unfaithfulness to God, the soul's lust and lewdness, its preference for another husband, and its desire for another love than that of God. It was with this spiritual adultery that God so often charged Israel and Jerusalem; it is with this he charges the church; and with this the whole race. We are unfaithful to God!

(1.) In heart. It was meant that he should have the first place there; he has the last, if any place at all. He is shut out from our love. We love others, but not God; the world, but not God; friends, but not God; money, but not God. O man, your heart is false to God; unfaithful in all its movements.

(2.) In life. As is the heart, so is the life; as is the inner, so is the outer man. God is not in our life. He is excluded from every part; thrust into a corner. Life is devoted to other objects. It is false to him. Word, deed, plan, behavior, business, education; life in all its movements, life in all its enjoyments, is false to God.

(3.) In religion. A man's religion is often the most untrue and hollow part of his life. In it he is more false to God than in any other of his actions. In religion he professedly comes nearest to God; yet in it he is often farthest away. In it he is like Jerusalem committing spiritual adultery, worshipping false gods, while pretending to worship the true.

Such is man in relation to God! All falsehood, unfaithfulness, lewdness. There is no part clean.

2. GOD'S DESIRE THAT WE SHOULD BE CLEAN.

He desires truth in the inward parts. He is faithful to us, and he wishes us to be faithful to him. God is not indifferent to our unfaithfulness, as if it did not matter to him. Nor does he treat it as a mere affront, or only as a sin, with which he is angry and which he condemns and will avenge. He wants our heart, our whole undivided heart; he wants it all for himself; he wants to fill it. He is a jealous God. Moreover he pities us because of the misery which our unfaithfulness brings on us. He sees us gaining nothing, but losing everything by it; and he pities us; he yearns over us; for our own sakes he desires to see us faithful to himself. Such is the God with whom we have to relate. He is one who takes a deep and loving interest in our welfare, and who pities us even when he judges us.

3. HIS REASONING WITH US.

Will you not be made clean; when will you? These are earnest words; words of solemn and urgent appeal to us. His pity is not idle. He comes down to us. He speaks to us. He stretches out his hands to us. Will you? Will you not? When will it be? How about now? Can words be more energetic, more personal, more explicit and direct? Every man must feel himself spoken to; spoken to most urgently; entreated, besought, reasoned with. He wants us to be cleansed, to turn, to seek his face, to give him our loyal love; he wants this immediately. Not a day to be lost. The time past has been enough, indeed, too long. He presses us with his solemn, urgent, loving now! No delay, no lingering, no hesitation. Give up your unbelief, and give it up now. Give up your idolatry, and give it up now. Turn to me, and turn now. Love me, and love me now.

4. OUR REFUSAL.

The passage takes for granted our refusal. Man rejects God, refuses to give him his heart, and deliberately persists in hypocrisy, insincerity, and unfaithfulness. As much externalism as can be asked he will give; but nothing beyond this. Words he will give, but nothing more. Sacrifices, ceremonies, incense, music, the bended knee, the religious voice and tone; all these he will give, but not the heart. That he deliberately refuses; refuses to love God, to trust God, to obey God, to give God anything but the service of the outer man, of the lip, the knee, the body.

5. GOD'S CONDEMNATION.

Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! It was this word that our Lord took up,

when he uttered woes against the cities of Galilee. How much is involved in that woe! It is the woe of God! He means what he says. His threats are not empty. He will execute his vengeance in the day of vengeance.

Woe to everyone that does not love God; that loves the creature better than the creator; that has given his heart to the world in preference to God.

Woe to him who is unfaithful to God; who worships him with the outer man but withholds the inner.

Woe to him whose religion is all unfaithfulness; who exhibits his dislike of God in those very acts in which he deals with God.

Yet he who utters woe, utters also come (Matt. 11:21; Matt. 11:28). And between these two are the sons of men. These are the two words which he sounds aloud to us; making us to feel his profound sincerity and his unutterable love.

LESSON 67

THE RESTING-PLACE FORGOTTEN

"They have forgotten their resting-place." – Jeremiah 50:6

IT was of Israel's apostasy that the prophet spoke. As Moses said, "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten the God that formed thee" (Deu. 32:18). So here Jeremiah says, "They have forgotten their resting-place." Thus it is with man! He has forgotten his resting-place! He has left God! "There is in him the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

1. THE RESTING-PLACE.

Israel had a resting-place. He is compared to a sheep who had a fold, and a shepherd, and pasture. That fold or resting-place was God's temple in the holy city; or you may say, God himself. They forsook him and his temple to serve other gods. Yet still he was their resting-place; a place for their rest, if they would but have taken it. So is it with man, the sinner. There is a resting-place for him. He needs it, and God has provided it. It is his resting-place. It is God himself, Christ Jesus, in whom there is "rest," "I will give you rest." As he is our "hiding-place," so he is our "resting-place." In him there is divine provision made for giving rest to the weary. He is the God-man, and that is rest; He is the propitiation for our sins, and that is rest; so that, as the sin-bearer, and the burden-bearer, he is our rest. In him is contained, and presented to us, the great love of God. As the protection from wrath, as the shadow from the heat, as the security from danger, as the divine fullness of all needed blessing, he is our resting-place. The Father knowing what we needed, has made provision in him for us. All that can give a sinner rest is contained in him; for Christ is all and in all. There is but one resting-place; not many. He who gains it has enough; he who misses it, misses everything; for there is no other resting-place for Israel or for us. One rock, one refuge, one foundation, one salvation, one resting-place!

2. MAN'S FORGETFULNESS OF IT.

The simple charge here against Israel is that of forgetting the resting-place. No strong words are used, such as despising, or dishonoring, or rejecting. All these may be true, but God confines himself to the mildest and simplest, that no man may evade the charge, or console his conscience with the thought that the description is exaggerated. God

simply charges him with "forgetfulness." This "resting place" is not prized nor used; it is forgotten; it is out of sight, out of mind, out of heart. This forgetfulness is strange and unaccountable. There are so many reasons why he should not forget it.

(1.) It is so needful. He cannot dispense with it. Other things may be, this must be. To a weary soul, what is more necessary than a resting-place?

(2.) It is so blessed. It contains both rest and blessedness. It is not like sleep, or the insensibility produced by drugs. It is blessedness, as well as rest.

(3.) It has been provided at such a cost. God knew that man needed it, and how much he needed it, and he provided it at an infinite cost.

Yet in spite of all this the fact remains, he does forget it. How and why is this?

(1.) He does not feel his need of it. He thinks he can do without it. He has others.

(2.) He does not know how blessed it would make him. What a rest it would be to him in his day of weariness. His thoughts of blessedness are all earthly and carnal.

(3.) He hates the God that provided it. The natural heart is full of this hatred. Hatred of God must lead men to seek to put all remembrance of the rest out of mind.

(4.) He hates its provisions. Its provisions are holy and righteous. They are all connected with God himself. And therefore man's object is to close his eyes and ears against a rest whose provisions and characteristics are all holy and divine.

3. MAN'S PREFERENCE FOR OTHER RESTS.

We ought not to call them rests, for they are not so. They are labor and weariness, sorrow and trouble. Israel wandered like lost sheep, from mountain to hill, in search of other rests, as if anything were better than God's. So does man. He wanders about seeking rest, and finding none. But poor as the other rests are, man prefers them to that of One in whom he has no delight. The sinner is weary, and he seeks rest. He seeks it for

himself. He goes from place to place, from object to object, seeking rest. Each one is poor, but he prefers it to God and to God's rest. This preference of creature-objects as the soul's rest is unspeakably sad and sinful; yet it is universal. There is hardly any object in creation which man has not tried, in preference, deliberate preference, to God. For it is all deliberate. It is not hasty, nor sudden, nor transient, but prolonged and resolute, thoroughly willful. It is this deliberate preference of other resting-places for the soul that is the great aggravation of his apostasy.

4. THE EVIL OF ALL THIS.

It is thoroughly evil; evil without excuse; evil towards God, and evil to himself. It brings punishment with it; it leaves the soul unsatisfied.

(1.) It brings punishment with it. God avenges this forgetfulness, this preference of other objects; for God is jealous. He chastened Israel; he does so to the sinner, both here and hereafter. God does not let us suppose that he overlooks the sin. He judges the sinner, and will judge him hereafter. He shows us how he resents the dishonor. Many a sorrow of earth is God's stroke of vengeance because of this forgetfulness. And will not hell be the completed vengeance of God because of this? God sends blight here on man for this contempt of the resting-place. But the eternal blight hereafter is infinitely terrible.

(2.) It leaves the soul unsatisfied. It fills no part of it; it does nothing to make it happy. It may drown the awful sense of emptiness for a while, but that is all. The weariness returns; and still the soul asks, Who will show us any good? No amount of pleasure, or excitement, or gaiety, or business can remove the weariness. Rather is that weariness increased the more it is tried to be removed.

1. Do you know that there is a resting-place? Have you not heard the report of it? There is such a thing as rest in a weary world. The goodness of it has gone abroad, Do not say then, it is vain to think to be happy; rest is impossible here. There is a resting-place.

2. Do you know what and where that resting-place is? It is to be found in God and his Son Christ Jesus. It is not afar off, but near. It is not inaccessible, but quite open and approachable. It is not costly, but free: "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

3. Are you forgetting it, and preferring other rests to it? Most

men are doing so. Are you? This is the way of the world; is it your way? Are you a forgetter of the rest? You may be no open sinner, but are you a forgetter of the rest?

4. Do you know the peril of doing this? It is misery here, it is woe hereafter. The wrath of God abides upon you. That soul of yours is sad even in the midst of pleasure. Your prospects are fearful in the extreme; for what but everlasting burnings are in store for them that forget God, or forget the resting-place? Take the resting-place as it is. It is sufficient for you. It will remove your weariness. Go then and rest.

LESSON 68

THE DAY THAT WILL RIGHT ALL WRONGS

"Thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called?" – Lamentations 1:21

THIS is the voice of faith; sorrowful faith, yet still faith, faith anticipating the coming day of right and truth. Jerusalem had fallen, her sons had gone into captivity, her walls and gates were in ruins, her streets were red with blood, her enemies were triumphant, and worse than all, her own sins had gone up to the heavens and brought down on her this terrible vengeance. In the midst of all this Jeremiah sits and mourns. All around is dark. There is only one bright spot, and that is in the distant future; the arrival of the day which God had "called" or summoned. For he looks up to God as the righteous Judge, the avenger of the wrongs of Israel as well as the punisher of her sins. He comforts himself by the thought that "God hath appointed (or called, that is, proclaimed) a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness." This is Jeremiah's one hope, the solitary ray of light in the midst of utter gloom.

So is it with us now. We are troubled with the evil that surrounds us. The wicked triumph. The good are few, and their names are cast out as evil. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. We are helpless in the midst of all this sin and blasphemy and defiance of God. What, then, is our consolation? That God will bring the day that he has "called;" that man's day and Satan's day shall not last forever, but that God's day is at hand; for he that shall come will come and will not tarry. Having done our utmost to arrest the flood of iniquity, to maintain the cause of God, to lift up a banner for the truth; and feeling that we are wholly impotent against the powers of earth and hell, we call to mind the promise that God has appointed a day for setting all things right, and we fall back on this sure word, comforting ourselves with the thought that the cause is really God's, and not ours, and that He will vindicate it in due time. This enables us to possess our souls in patience.

God, by his prophet Amos (v. 18) speaks of this day, 'and of those who look for it, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord, to what end is it for you? "As if he would say, Ye know not what ye are doing; why do you desire that day? It is darkness, and not light. And this is, indeed, one awful aspect of the coming day. It is not to be desired, but dreaded. But there is another aspect of it, so that it is a day to be desired, not dreaded.

Let us speak of the reasons why a believing man should desire the judgment day and the judgment seat, and looking up calmly, should say to God with longing heart, You will bring the day that You have called; should respond to words of Christ regarding his arrival, with "Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus."

1. GOD SHALL NO LONGER BE SHUT OUT OF HIS OWN WORLD.

He is now excluded. God is not the God of this world. Man shuts Him out, and has done so from the first. Depart from us, is the world's all but unanimous voice. In so far as the individual will, or the united will of humanity can do it, God has been shut out. But when the day that God has called shall arrive, God shall interpose. He shall come in and show Himself. He shall take to Himself His great power and reign. What a world it will be when God shall no longer be shut out! In vain men strive to banish Him. They may do so for a little while, but the day of God is coming. He will force open the world's long shut gates, and enter triumphantly.

2. CHRIST SHALL NO LONGER BE DENIED AND BLASPHEMED.

The special enmity of the race has been directed against the Son, the Christ of God; against Him in whom God expressly reveals himself. It is Him that men deny and blaspheme. A Christ in some shape they may own, but not the Christ of God. The Christ of Socinus, or Strauss, or Renan, or Colenso, they will tolerate, but at anything beyond this they scoff and gnash their teeth. How often are our souls troubled, and our hearts all but broken, at the sounds of blasphemy, the utterances of hatred against Christ. Then we fall back on the promise regarding the coming day, when Christ shall be exalted and His name honored! O day to be desired, when it shall be! Lord, hasten the day that You have called.

3. EVIL SHALL NO LONGER PREVAIL.

God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. The world shall be no longer what it now is. Satan shall no more have dominion, as the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air; he shall be dethroned and bound. Antichrist shall no longer have power, but be smitten. Iniquity shall no more overflow. The curse shall pass away, and creation be delivered. The cry of the preacher (Ecc. 1:8) shall no more be heard, all things are full of labor, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Man shall not put

light for darkness, or darkness for light, nor call evil good and good evil. The effects of the fall shall disappear, and all things be made new.

4. ERROR SHALL GIVE PLACE TO TRUTH.

The first sin was at once an error and a disobedience. Man allowed dark and untrue thoughts of God to come in. Since then error has overflowed the earth like a deluge. It has spread, and ramified, and multiplied. Out of God's book of truth men have (in perverse ways) drawn errors and falsehoods innumerable. Some of the worst untruths have been those professedly deduced from the book of truth. Men glory in error, provided it be either clever or earnest. They call it speculation, philosophy, free thought. Yet all error is sin. And we find error everywhere; in the world and in the church. God is dishonored by it. His Son is denied. His book is set aside or misinterpreted. But when man's day is over, and God's day shall come, then error shall depart, and truth shall flourish. False science, vain philosophy, impure literature shall no more be known. True knowledge shall cover earth and fill the souls of men. Truth shall then be prized and exalted when He who is the truth and the true One shall reign. His throne shall be the throne of truth; His crown the crown of truth. His light shall put darkness to flight. Every falsehood and unreality shall disappear. All shall be real and true.

5. THE SAINTS OF GOD SHALL BE MALIGNED NO MORE.

All along, hatred, contempt, misrepresentation, have been their portion. All manner of evil has been spoken and written concerning them, both in life and after death. They have been treated as the off-scouring of all things. But when that day shall come which God has called, this shall be all reversed. Their lives shall be all rewritten, and that by a divine hand; no misrepresentation, no falsehood there. The one-sided or malevolent histories that have falsely been told about them shall vanish. God himself shall proclaim their true character and noble deeds or sacrifices, which the world denied or sneered at. We shall have new and noble volumes of "worthies," of saints and martyrs whose names the world never introduced into its histories. What a day of redressing injuries and righting the wronged shall God's day be! Let us then be patient under the slanders of evil men. Let ungodly historians vilify our noblest men, our Reformers, our Covenanters. Let them slander Knox and Calvin, or Melville and Rutherford, or Whitefield and the evangelists of his age; the day of redress is coming. The falsehoods will not always lie upon their memories. God himself shall undertake their vindication, to the confusion

of their slanderers. What a day for the clearing up of characters, and the placing of events, and words, and deeds in their proper light. Then shall the lie be answered, the accusation confuted before the universe. Then shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Let us then rest in hope. Let us be patient. Let us meekly bear wrongs and reproaches. He that believes does not make haste. This is night; but the morning comes. Let us rejoice in the prospect of it, and do our work regardless of present scorn and reproach, anticipating the "well done" of the great Master and Judge. He stands before the door.

LESSON 69

THE GLORY AND THE LOVE

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord!" –
Ezekiel 1:28

THE Book of Ezekiel corresponds in many respects with the Apocalypse. These books begin and end much in the same way; only the Old Testament prophet takes more the earthly aspects of things, the New Testament prophet the heavenly. Ezekiel's first chapter is a description of the shekinah and cherubim, John's first chapter is a description of Christ himself. Ezekiel's last chapters relate to Israel and the earthly Jerusalem, John's to the church and the heavenly Jerusalem.

Ezekiel's is the first full description we have of the shekinah and the cherubim. They are often alluded to in Jewish history; Isaiah specifically mentions them; but they are described only here. Much about them was probably known to the Jews; for the high priest once a year was permitted to look upon them, and would relate when he came out what he saw; at least we do not read that what he saw when he went in were among the unspeakable things "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." But here the prophet is inspired to write down the details of the "great sight" in the holy of holies.

God was about to remove the glory from Israel; but before doing so, he does two things. He first describes the glory, that Israel might know what they were losing; and secondly, He gives his reasons for removing it (v. 12), the sins of Jerusalem and of Israel. This first chapter is a description of the glory, and the following chapters contain the reasons for the withdrawal; while the concluding chapters contain a prediction of its return in greater splendor, never again to depart; the intermediate chapters containing God's judgments on those Gentile nations which were more or less in connection with Israel. Thus the book of Ezekiel is connected in all its parts throughout; simple, yet complete in its object and execution.

Let us mark the several words of our text, each of them full of meaning.

1. THE LORD.

That is, God. This is sometimes the name of Godhead; but more frequently (and originally) Messiah's name. In the New Testament, "Lord" is almost always the name of Christ. Here in Ezekiel it may be

either or both. That which is seen there relates to God; to the Godhead; but then it is in Messiah, in the Word made flesh, that God comes into sight. So that while what the prophet saw relates to Godhead, it does so in connection with Messiah as the manifestation or revelation of Godhead.

2. THE GLORY.

God is the glorious One. To him we ascribe the GLORY, that is, all infinite perfection and excellence. That which we call his "perfections," Scripture calls his "glory." It was this glory which Moses prayed to see; and it was this which God made known to him when He passed by and proclaimed His name (Ex. 33:22; Ex. 34:6-7). It was something infinitely admirable, perfect, loveable; solemn and awful, yet beautiful and attractive. It is the full glory of the Lord that we behold in Jesus.

3. THE LIKENESS.

The word is the same as in Gen. 1:26, "After our likeness" and occurs more frequently in Ezekiel than in all Scripture besides. Man was originally God's "likeness;" but this being defaced, God makes another and more perfect likeness of Himself. The full development of this "likeness" is in Jesus Christ, "the express image of his person;" but there was an imperfect foreshadowing of this in that which was placed in the tabernacle and temple, which "dwelt between the cherubim," or rather, which "inhabited the cherubim." Every other "likeness," or attempt to make a likeness, God has forbidden. For none can reveal God but himself.

4. THE APPEARANCE.

That is "the vision" that met the eye, the rays streaming from the glory; the brightness or "off-shining" of the glory, as Paul expresses it (Heb. 1:3); the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The "vision," or "appearance," or "visible form," was meant for man's eye to look upon, it was the visible representation of the invisible God, in such a way as should reveal the glory to creatures who otherwise cannot see God, the "King eternal, immortal, and invisible."

Thus God gave to Israel a glorious discovery of himself, a visible manifestation of his invisible perfections, a perfect embodiment to man's creature senses of God's character and excellency; so that by looking to it man might know God, in his love, his greatness, his holiness, his majesty. All this was afterwards gathered up and embodied in the man Christ

Jesus. Old Testament saints got glimpses of God and of his glory; enough to gladden them and produce happy confidence, but not enough fully to satisfy; for all these appearances said, There is still something behind, something still to come; and that something was nothing less than the only begotten of the Father. So is it said to us, "There is much yet to be revealed," "good things to come."

The residence of this glory in the temple was the special mark of God's favor to Israel, his special honor bestowed on Jerusalem. For ages that glory dwelt in that city, among that people. Its presence proclaimed the love of God, and his desire that Israel should know him. When, therefore, Israel had sinned beyond divine forbearance, God marked his condemnation and displeasure by removing the glory. But before He did so, he warned, and threatened, and entreated; then when he could bear their sins no longer, he sent his prophets to announce the departure of the glory. But even to the last his long-suffering shows itself, just as when Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The glory first comes out from the sanctuary, and lingers at the threshold, unwilling to leave. Then it takes its place over the city, lingering, and unwilling to leave. Then it goes to the Mount of Olives, still fondly lingering, desirous if possible to remain in the beloved city. Then at last, when every message is vain, it takes to itself wings and vanishes away.

What a lesson is here! What love, what pity, what longsuffering, what yearning! Truly the Lord "hateth putting away." He would fain abide in the place of which He had said, "This is my rest." Slowly, slowly he turns away from it; by that lingering slowness inviting them to ask him to return, to lift the universal cry, Stay, oh stay! And he would have stayed; even at the last; but Israel would have none of Him. Rather did they pray Him to depart out of their coasts.

Thus God lingers over his well-beloved world! Why this long delay of judgment? Why these ages of suspended wrath?

Iniquity abounds, yet God does not strike. Men provoke Him to the uttermost, yet he yearns over them with his old unwearied utterance of love, "How shall I give thee up?" He has not forgotten his threatenings. He is not trifling with sin, nor indifferent to the crimes of earth. But he is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Yes; the meaning of the delay and the longsuffering is SALVATION. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He would fain spare even Sodom, much more Jerusalem. For God is love, and the last days of earth's apostasy will yet bear testimony

to the sincerity of his messages, to the riches of divine grace; to the unquenched love of God.

LESSON 70

FALSE RELIGION AND ITS DOOM

"I will scatter your bones round about your altars." – Ezekiel 6:5

IT is of Israel's idolatries that the prophet is speaking; her false gods, her idol altars, her lying prophets and priests. God abhorred them, for he is a jealous God, and with him there is but one religion, one creed, one Bible, one God. Men may speak of their right to believe as they please, and worship as they think fit. But God claims the right of deciding for us in these things. We are not under man in these, but we are under God. He will not tolerate falsehood, or error, or unbelief, or superstition, or anything inconsistent with His revelation. Every false religion He will destroy, every false religionist He will condemn. The true and the false religion are in His eyes as far asunder as east and west, as unlike as night and day. There can be no compromise, no fellowship of light with darkness, of Christ with Belial, of the believer with the infidel. God is not a man that he should lie, or that he should overlook the lies of others. If he is the true God, let us follow him, let us worship him in spirit and in truth. Man says that he wants sincerity and earnestness; but what God asks is truth, THE truth, the one truth, the one religion which he has revealed. Mark these things, (1.) false religion; (2.) its uselessness; (3.) its hatefulness; (4.) its doom.

1. FALSE RELIGION.

There is such a thing as false religion. It may be earnest and zealous, yet false. No amount of sincerity or zeal will make that true which is in itself false. False religion is the worship of a false God, or the false worship of the true God. In general both are mixed, though in different proportions. To worship Baal or Molech would be to worship a false God. But have we not, unconsciously, perhaps, many Baals and Molechs, which we worship under the name of God, as the statue of Jupiter at Rome is adored as that of Peter. We worship a false god when we do not worship the very God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and we worship the true God untruly when we give him only half a heart, half a soul, when we go to Him with the doubt, and the gloom, and the unbelief that belong to Baal. Go to Baal with your uncertain and doubtful worship, do not go to the living God, and think not that the utterance of some true words or the expression of a little sentimental devotion is the true worship of the true God.

2. ITS USELESSNESS.

It profits nothing and nobody, either here or hereafter. It is not acceptable to God. It will not be counted a substitute for the true. It does not satisfy the conscience. It does not make the man happy. It does not fill the heart. It does not heal diseases nor remove burdens. It does not give a man a good hope toward God, or brighten his prospects for eternity. It is irksome and unprofitable, only cheating the poor worshipper into the belief that he has felt or performed something good and worthy. It will not stand the fire. It is but wood, and hay, and stubble. The judgment will sweep it all away. It does neither for time nor eternity, neither for earth nor heaven. It is so unreal.

3. ITS HATEFULNESS.

God abhors it. It has not one feature that is pleasing to Him. It is outward, it is untrue, it is against His revelation, it is dishonoring, it is self-exalting. Therefore God abhors it. He wants the heart, it does not have one. He wants love, trust, peace, joy, child-like confidence, reverence; it has none of these. It is deficient in every essential element that God expects in worship. Against false worship His prophets were commanded to speak. It was as smoke in His nostrils, abominable in His eyes. It is hateful in itself, it makes the worshipper hateful, it is pure mockery. It is rottenness and death; a skeleton, not a thing of flesh and blood, a mouthful of words, a handful of dust and ashes. Surely it is hateful to Him who is true, who desires truth in the inward parts.

4. ITS DOOM.

The worship shall be destroyed and the worshipper covered with shame and everlasting contempt. The scattering of the bones of the worshippers round the altars (2 Kings 23:16), like that of mingling their blood with their sacrifices, was the indication of utter contempt as well as condemnation. It was vengeance extending even to the dust, (1.) Certain condemnation, for God is to do it, and he will not lie. (2.) Utter condemnation, for here is God's hand interposing to judge completely. (3.) Visible condemnation. Before men's eyes, in a visible and striking form, so that there may be no mistake, not in a corner but in open day before all. (4.) Expressive condemnation, such as will mark the sin; not at random, nor general, each man's sin shall bear its own peculiar brand of punishment. (5.) Contemptuous condemnation, mingling the worshipper and his worship in one common ruin. Both shall perish, perish together, perish in the same doom; God shall laugh at their calamity, and mock

when their fear comes. (6.) Everlasting condemnation. Their altars shall never rise again. They and their false religion shall perish forever. No falsehoods in hell. No hollow religion amid the everlasting burnings.

See that your religion is true, your worship real. Beware of hollowness, falsehood, externalism, of everything that will not stand the fan of the great Husbandman when He comes in his glory for sifting and for judgment.

LESSON 71

NO BREATH NO LIFE

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them." – Ezekiel 37:8

THIS scene has two aspects (contains an event and a truth), the prophetic, which specially points to Israel's restoration in the latter day; the spiritual, pointing to the case of individual souls, or churches or congregations.

There are four stages presented to us, (1.) the bone-heaps in the valley, "very dry;" (2.) the gathering and reconstruction of these bones; (3.) the clothing with flesh, sinews, and skin; (4.) the infusion of breath or life. It is through the last of these that the living man is constituted; and without it there is but the picture or statue of a man.

The "breath" is manifestly the "life;" communicated by the Spirit of life. This life may have different stages; but wherever it is there is a true and complete man. The disciples had life before our Lord breathed on them, but then they attained more. They had life before Pentecost, but then they obtained more. It was life that God communicated when he created man; it is life (of a higher kind) that the Spirit of God communicates to the soul at conversion. The last Adam, as the possessor of the Holy Spirit, is a quickening Spirit.

Therefore a man may be very like a saint and yet not be one. A church or congregation may be very like a Christian one, with a fair appearance and compact organization; all in excellent bustling order, numerous, generous, united, earnest after a sort; and yet lack one thing which neutralizes and paralyses all the rest, the breath of life.

1. OUR CREED MAY BE SOUND, AND YET WE MAY NOT BE CHRISTIANS.

Balaam's creed seems to have been sound; also that of Judas and Demas. It may be the creed of apostles and reformers, the creed of the Synod of Dort, or the Assembly of Westminster; yet all within may be wrong. It will form part of the bones, or the sinews, or the flesh; but that is all. Indeed, its soundness may be the occasion of serious self-deception; we may mistake orthodoxy for life, the correctness of our confession of faith

for the "breath." An inanimate, unproductive creed, what will it do for you in the day of the Lord? What will it do for you now? Does it give you real peace, real liberty, real fellowship with God?

2. OUR RELIGION MAY BE EXTERNALLY COMPLETE, AND YET WE MAY NOT BE CHRISTIANS.

By religion I mean all that pertains to the worship and service of God, private or public; our praises, our prayers, our sanctuary services, our family worship. What are all these without the inward breath? What is routine without life? Mechanical religion may do for the gods of Greece and Rome, but not for the living and true God. Mechanical religion may do for those who fancy that religious performances are work done, or money paid, in order to ward off divine anger, and persuade God to keep them out of hell; but not for those who know that they are the channels of fellowship with God. Your sanctuary attendance may be regular and reverent; but what if there is no breath in it? Your prayers and praises may be punctual and unexceptionable, but what if there is no breath in them? Will God accept them? Will they satisfy you? Will they make you happy? Will they not be irksome and intolerable? And the more you multiply them, the more intolerable.

3. OUR GOOD WORKS MAY BE NUMEROUS AND PRAISEWORTHY, YET WE MAY NOT BE CHRISTIANS.

It is not the work that makes the Christian, but the Christian that makes the work. This is a day of good works; of benevolent schemes; of societies great and small; of organizations for the relief of the poor, and the reformation of the wicked. They who conduct them may be earnest and self-denying men and women. But is the breath there? They often wonder why so much should be done with so little fruit. But is there not a cause? Is there breath, life, in all this? Can statues, or machines, or engines do the work of the living God? No, it is life that does real work; it is life that is successful; it is life that God honors, and by which He works. Let us see that in doing Christian work, we ourselves are Christians; else we shall be but Noah's carpenters after all. We may do many good works, and yet not be Christians. Many shall come in that day, saying, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, but the answer is, "I never knew you."

4. OUR LIFE MAY BE EXEMPLARY AND YET WE MAY NOT BE CHRISTIANS.

There may be bones, and sinews, and flesh, and yet no breath, no life!
There are many who mistake a fair external demeanor for Christian life.
A man may be so like a Christian that another could not suppose that
there was anything wrong; and yet there might be no breath!

A life with "no breath" must be,

(1.) A very imperfect life. Many features wanting, even outward ones,
much more inward. The light will be dim; the salt will lack savor.

(2.) A very unhappy life. There is the secret feeling that all is wrong.
Everything is irksome; for want of the divine internal reality.

(3.) A very unsuccessful life. It is not mere bustle, or earnestness, or
zeal that does the true work for God. If there be no breath, what are
these? All will be labor in vain.

There is breath for you, O sinner, in Him who has the Spirit, who is our
breath. You will not be able to say, I perished, or I was unhappy, or
useless, because God would not give me this breath.

LESSON 72

EVERY CHRISTIAN A TEACHER

"They that understand among the people shall instruct many." – Daniel 11:33

WE do not receive knowledge for ourselves alone. We must share it with others. Like our High Priest, we must "have compassion on the ignorant," and must remember Him who said, "Learn of me."

In the days here spoken of by Daniel there shall be some, it is said, "who do know their God" (v. 32). These are "they that understand"; for it is the knowledge of God that is alone accounted understanding in the Bible. He who knows God is a man of understanding, he who knows Him not is "void of understanding," "a fool." For this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

They that have understanding are evidently few. They are described as "among the people," as if they were a light in a dark place; a few who are of God, while the whole world lies in wickedness. "Not many wise" are called, is the law of this age; indeed, not many of the world who become wise. To be wise in Christ is the privilege of few; in order to this they must become "fools," fools in the eye of men, "fools that they may be wise," for the wisdom of God is foolishness with men. It is a great thing to know God, to understand the things of God. Happy are they who know and understand.

Taking these words as applicable to every Christian man and woman, let us see what they teach us.

1. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE AMONG THE PEOPLE.

He is in the world, but not of it. He has been delivered out of it. He is of the same stock as the rest of mankind, just one of the people, one of Adam's race. He is one of a small band, not one of a multitude; one of those of whom our Lord spoke when he said, "Few there be that find it." He was born of the flesh before he was born of the spirit; he bore the image of the earthly before he bore the image of the heavenly.

2. HE IS ONE THAT HAS UNDERSTANDING.

It is this that in particular marks him out from "the people." He knows

what they do not. He has come to be of an understanding heart. He may not have much of earthly literature or human science, but he knows God; not only knows about him, but knows him. He has not much to say for himself save this, that he knows God. The special distinctiveness of a Christian is that he is a man of understanding. He may be poor, obscure, unlearned, untraveled, yet he understands what millions do not. He may not know the world and its wonders, but he knows Him who made all these, he knows His greatness and His love.

3. A CHRISTIAN IS ONE WHO DOES NOT KEEP HIS KNOWLEDGE TO HIMSELF.

He is not proud because he knows what others do not. He pities others, and longs to share his treasures; not to divide his inheritance, for that is impossible, but to impart what he possesses. He gives, yet he retains; he shares, yet he is none the poorer. He has got a loving and unselfish heart as well as an understanding one. He becomes a generous giver of what God has given. He is like the clouds, which cannot contain their water within themselves; like the sun, which cannot but shine; like the river, which cannot but scatter fertility; like the flower, which cannot but dispense fragrance.

4. A CHRISTIAN IS AN INSTRUCTOR.

He has been taught, and he becomes a teacher. He has found the preciousness of knowledge and he seeks to impart it. He feels that what he formerly needed so much was teaching, that what the world still needs is teaching, and so he becomes a teacher. Not as if setting up for superior powers or knowledge, but simply as one who has had a treasure imparted to him, and who therefore longs to impart to his poorer fellow-creatures his divine gold and silver. He sees that the great need of humanity is teaching, true teaching, teaching in the things pertaining to the true God, and he sets himself fervently to teaching an untaught world. Christians, you must be teachers. This is your vocation, as those who have themselves been taught of God. Teach by your lives. Teach also in words. Lose no opportunity of instructing others, young or old. Let your lips keep knowledge for all. Live an instructive life.

5. A CHRISTIAN IS AN INSTRUCTOR OF MANY.

He does not confine himself to a small inner circle, but he has his eye on everybody. He is not content with only one or two. He remembers the words of commendation to Levi, "He walked with me in peace and truth,

and did turn away MANY from iniquity." Many, many, is his watchword. Like Joseph Alleine, he becomes "insatiably greedy of souls." Many, many is the burden of his prayers. Many, many is inscribed on all his plans. His spirit widens and widens, his eye and heart take in larger and larger circles. He remembers the multitudes whom his Master taught, the thousands in the early days of the Church, and he seeks many, many.

LESSON 73

WORK, REST, AND RECOMPENSE

"Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shall rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." – Daniel 12:13

DANIEL reminds us of John. The one was the "man greatly beloved," the other "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The one had frequent revelations and visions, especially of the times and seasons, so had the other. The one fainted and was without strength at the sight of Messiah's glory; the other fell at Christ's feet as one dead. Both were comforted by the hand of Jesus laid upon them. Both were exiles in a Gentile land. Both were very aged men. In our text we are reminded of the last words of our Lord to John, "Follow me." To Daniel it is, Go thy way till the end.

Here we have three things for God's Daniels, God's saints, in these days: (1.) a saint's present work; (2.) a saint's coming rest; (3.) a saint's future glory.

1. A SAINT'S PRESENT WORK.

' "Go thou thy way till the end be." This reminds us of "If I will that he tarry till I come." These visions are not to make you careless in duty, heedless of common things, neglectful of daily work. No, go your way till the end, work while it is day. It was meant.

(1.) To calm. That which he had seen and heard was fitted to trouble, and excite, and discompose. He had been in the presence of God, like Paul, in the third heaven. He had been carried forward into the marvelous events of the latter day. He needed a calming word. And here it is, "Go thy way till the end." Do your ordinary work; walk in the simple way of common life. In the midst of this age's convulsions, and storms, and heat; in the prospect of what is coming on the earth in the last days, we need calming words too. Let us listen to the calm, holy voice that speaks to us ever from heaven, "Be still, and know that I am God;" "Let not your hearts be troubled;" "Keep your selves in the love of God;" "What is that to thee? Follow me."

(2.) To exhort. The words are those of command or exhortation, like those of Jesus, "Follow thou me." It is not that we are permitted to attend to our daily duties in the midst of all these vast events, present or to come; we are commanded to do so; to work while it is day. Sow

your seed. Do not be lazy in business. Be careful and scrupulous in filling up the common daily outline of life. Do its little things well, no less than its great.

(3.) To cheer. The word speaks of an end. It is not perpetual toil, endless weariness. There remains a rest. The end comes! It may not be long. Life will soon be done. Or the Lord may soon be here. Be not weary or disheartened. Be of good cheer. What are a few years of toil in prospect of the eternal rest? How needful to keep in mind these words, "Go thou thy way till the end be." Let us not be turned aside from the plain path; nor troubled in mind; nor disconcerted in plans; nor led to slacken our diligence. Let us press on, fight on, work on, run on; steadfast and unmovable in the work of the Lord. We have a daily work to do in the sight of God; let us do it well. Let us be faithful in all things; men in earnest; bent on doing the work which lies to our hand.

2. A SAINT'S COMING REST.

There remains a rest! Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors. The great rest is when the Lord comes. But there are two other rests. There is present rest in Jesus; and there is rest in the grave. And it is this rest in the grave that seems the one promised to Daniel, as to Abraham, "Thou shall go to thy fathers in peace" (Gen. 15:15). He was to live long, but not always; and as soon as his time here was done he was to rest. This rest is the same as that which is called "sleeping in Jesus." He that sleeps in Jesus rests. We are warranted then to set this rest before our eyes. Though death is our enemy, not our friend; and though death is not the same as the Lord's coming, still death does introduce the saints into rest. It is the "saint's rest," an earnest of the saint's everlasting rest; when we shall toil no more, and be provoked no more, and be weary no more, and be pained no more, and be burdened no more. Work well, then, for the work-day is not long, and the rest-day comes! "Thou shall rest," is God's promise to us as well as to Daniel.

3. A SAINT'S FUTURE GLORY.

"Thou shall stand (or rise) in thy lot at the end of the days." Here we have,

(1.) the days. The days are those mentioned in the previous verses; the end of these days is the beginning of blessedness; "blessed is he that

cometh to the 1335 days." It seems intimated to Daniel that the end of these days is not to be in his lifetime. As for us, we do not know when the end shall be; we know not the times and seasons; we know not when the Lord comes.

(2.) The standing. To "stand" or "rise" are used as synonymous. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" (Psa. 1:5).

This "standing" is evidently resurrection, in both passages, as in Dan. 12:2. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." It is of resurrection that God here speaks to Daniel. He shall arise! This is the great promise, so often reiterated in the New Testament: "Thou shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Intermediate blessing there is; promises of intermediate rest abound; but the final glory is yet in reserve; both for Daniel and for us. Resurrection. The first resurrection! Resurrection unto life! The better resurrection! Corruption exchanged for incorruption; dishonor for glory.

(3.) The lot. Daniel has a lot, or portion, or special recompense of his own. To this he shall arise after he has rested in the grave from his weary work on earth. There may be a twofold reference here,

(a) General. The first resurrection, or resurrection of the just, or "resurrection from among the dead," or resurrection unto everlasting life, or the better resurrection; these expressions refer to the saint's reward when the Lord comes. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." This glorious resurrection is held before Daniel's eyes as his reward. It is held before ours! "My dead body shall thou arise" (Isa. 26:19).

(b) Special. There seems something more special promised here to Daniel (as to Zerubbabel, Hag. 2:23); some personal and peculiar reward. What that may be we do not know. "A prophet's reward" is referred to by our Lord as something special and great. Each saint shall have his own crown, his own weight of glory, his own inheritance, "thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

The message, then, in these last days (days of excitement, and change, and darkness), is, labor on, perseveringly, calmly, joyfully, hopefully. The Lord is at hand. The resurrection comes. The glory of that day will be an ample reward.

LESSON 74

HUMAN HEEDLESSNESS AND DIVINE REMEMBRANCE

"They consider not in their hearts that I remember their wickedness." – Hosea 7:2

LET me present this passage to you under these two heads: (1.) human sin; (2.) the divine remembrance of it.

1. HUMAN SIN.

What is sin? It is not (1.) an accident, (2.) nor imprudence, (3.) nor a misfortune, (4.) nor a disease, (5.) nor a weakness. It may be all these, perhaps; but it is something beyond all these; something of a more fatal and terrible character. It is something (1.) with which law has to do, (2.) which righteousness abhors, (3.) which the judge condemns, (4.) which calls for the infliction of punishment from God. In other words, it is GUILT, it is CRIME. Man's tendency is either to deny it or to extenuate it. He either pleads not guilty, or he smooths over the evil; giving it specious names. Or if he does not succeed in these, he casts the blame off himself; he shifts the responsibility to his nature, his birth, his circumstances, his education; indeed, to God himself. But human sin is not to be diluted or transformed into a shadow. It is infinitely real, true, deep, and terrible in the eyes of Him with whom we relate. It is the transgression of law; and as such must be dealt with by God, and felt by ourselves. Let us not trifle with sin, either in the conscience or the intellect. Let us learn its true nature from the terribleness of the wrath and condemnation threatened by God against every sin, great or small.

2. THE DIVINE REMEMBRANCE.

God remembers. His memory does not fail in any one thing. Nothing escapes it, great or small. Nothing removes anything from it.

(1.) Time does not erode it. Ages blot out nothing. The past is as clear and full as the present.

(2.) Other events do not destroy it. With man one fact expels another; today's doings destroy the recollection of yesterday's. Not so with God.

(3.) Our own forgetfulness will not erode it. Our memory and God's are very different. Our forgetfulness does not make Him forget.

God remembers! Nothing can make Him forget. He may seem to do so; but it is only seeming. He remembers the person, the time, the circumstances, the thing itself; public or secret; bad or good; negative or positive. He remembers SINS. Let no one say he is too good to remember them. He cannot but remember. He would not be God if it were otherwise. God can forget nothing; for memory is but the knowledge of the past, and He knows everything. It may be found in the future that man forgets nothing either; and that the bitterness of a ruined eternity will lie in memory. But though man should forget, God remembers; and He can call up sin to remembrance. It will and must come up at last. Men may try to forget it; to drown all thought of it; to eradicate all traces of it; but it will come up! As even Job said, My bones are full of the sins of my youth. For a season here men succeed often in forgetting sin. And having forgot it they conclude that God has done the same. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember their wickedness." They conceive that God's memory is as treacherous as their own. For this God reproves them. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself," that my memory was as faithless as thine. But the day is coming which shall show how foolish, how criminal was such a thought! The opening of the books will show this if nothing else will.

But there is such a thing as forgetfulness with God. "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." This is the true oblivion; divine oblivion of sin; perfect and eternal oblivion. And how is this? The prophet in the Old Testament, and the apostle in the New, tell us that this is one of the provisions and results of the New Covenant; that covenant which has been sealed with the blood of the Son of God. It is the blood that enables God to forget sin; that blots out all sin of ours from His eternal memory; so that it becomes as if it had never been. But this oblivion is no accident; no mere result of time and intervening circumstances. It is righteous oblivion! Oblivion which righteousness constrains! O blessed oblivion which is the result of righteousness. Had it been accomplished in any other way, there would always have been the danger of reviving memory; memory rousing itself from dormancy, and calling for vengeance after all. But where righteousness has produced the forgetfulness, all is well forever. Sin is buried beyond the possibility of resurrection.

But when does God cease to remember sin in my individual case? When I

have accepted the covenant; when I have fixed my eyes upon the blood; when I have received the divine testimony to that great propitiation which has made it a righteous thing in God to remember my sins no more!

Is not this a description of our world? It is not here the fool saying, "There is no God;" nor is it men saying, God has forgotten us; but it is, God has forgotten our sins! Indifference to sin like their own, forgetfulness like their own, they ascribe to Him! "God does not remember sin," is this great world's motto. And so they neglect the sacrifice for sin, and put away all fear of hell. "They consider not in their hearts that I remember their wickedness." What will they say when the Judge arrives?

LESSON 75

LIES, THE FOOD OF MAN

"Ye have eaten the fruit of lies." – Hosea 10:13

THE subject suggested by these words is, "lies, their fruit, and man's eating it;" or simply, "lies and their fruit." The word is used in a twofold sense, a lie as to fact, and a lie as to doctrine; untrue reports and unsound teaching, false testimony and false knowledge (or dogma). This falsity may be negative or positive, as "Ye shall not surely die," and "Ye shall be as gods." The lie comes sometimes from man, sometimes from Satan, but never from God, for God is not a man that he should lie; never from the works of God when rightly interpreted and understood.

1. BY TWO GREAT LIES WAS MAN LED AWAY FROM GOD.

By the same two lies has the separation been kept up. On these two lies the world has been feeding ever since the fall. Their fruit has been woe and death. These lies are those referred to above, the one a denial of Godhead-perfection; the other, an assertion of creature-perfection; the one saying, there is no such thing as sin and punishment, the other, that there is no such thing as creature-hood limitation and dependency. "Ye shall not die," "Ye shall be as gods."

2. THESE TWO LIES GOD HAS WRITTEN HIS BIBLE TO CONTRADICT, FOR THE WHOLE DIVINE WORD IS A REFUTATION OF THEM.

But the special refutation is to be seen in the life and death of the Christ of God. His death, as the sin-bearer, said, Ye shall surely die; and His life, as the dependent Son of Man, showed, that no circumstances, no progress, no knowledge could ever make man God, the creature the Creator; but the human, however blessed, and holy, and wise, must ever be the human, and the divine the divine.

Israel's history, to which our passage refers, is the history of the fruit of lies. "They believed not God," is the accusation brought against them. They rejected the truth, they received the lie, and the fruit of this was judgment. Every sorrow that came on them was the fruit of a lie. Their last great sorrow, the ruin of Jerusalem, and the slaughter of its citizens, was the fruit of a lie. And are they not now, in their dispersion, eating the

fruit of lies?

The world's history is the same. Our race has been eating the fruit of lies; not simply of sin, but of lies. The sorrows, sighs, tears, pains of our race are the fruit of lies, the original lie of Paradise, and a thousand such since then. The sweating-toils of man, the travail-pangs of woman, the cries of suffering infancy, what are they but the fruit of a lie? Yon tossing sickbed, yon weary death-bed ("The long day's dying" Milton), yon swelling churchyard, yon shroud, yon coffin, yon funeral, yon open grave, what are they? The fruit of a lie. It is bitter, poisonous, long-lasting fruit. And the world's last days are no improvement upon its first, for in them comes "the strong delusion that they should believe a lie."

3. WHAT IS EVERY FALSE RELIGION BUT THE BELIEF OF A LIE, AND THE JUDGMENTS WITH WHICH GOD HAS VISITED ITS PROFESSORS, THE EATING THE FRUIT OF A LIE.

Anti-Christianity is the special and preeminent exhibition of the belief of a lie, and the doom of antichrist will be the special and awful exhibition of "eating the fruit of lies."

Each soul's history resembles the above. It is the history of the belief of lies, of a thousand lies. We begin to believe lies as soon as we can believe anything at all, and we act daily upon believed lies. The two original Satanic lies are continually coming up, and along with them myriads of others, all leading us astray. Each day brings forth the lie, the fruit, the eating thereof. Satan, or the world, or the flesh, or a friend, or a book, or a scene whispers the lie; it is fair and specious, we believe it; it brings forth fruit, we eat of it, and the end is bitterness and disappointment. We "feed on lies."

What is pleasure, or lust, or revelry? It is the belief of a lie, the feeding on a lie. What is worldliness, the love of gaiety, the absorption of the heart in business? The belief of a lie, and the feeding on a lie. We persuade ourselves that this world is good, and pleasant, and excellent, and so we pursue it in preference to the world to come. But the belief of the lie is quickly followed up by disappointment, the sense of hollowness and dissatisfaction. God makes us eat of the fruit of lies, that we may be torn from them and turn ourselves to the truth.

What keeps us from Christ? A lie, or lies! What makes us choose the broad way? A lie, or lies! What is unbelief but the belief of a lie? From

where do our doubts and fears come but from the belief of lies in preference to the truth; indeed, from our making God a liar, in not believing the record which he has given of his Son? Where does backsliding come from, or the loss of our first love, but from our returning to the lie which we had rejected?

4. GOD, IN HIS GOSPEL, MEETS THE LIE, AND ALL THE LIES WHICH HAVE SPRUNG UP ON EARTH.

He sends us the truth; He sends us the true One. And while He meets the lie, He does it in His own divine way. He says, Yes, ye shall not surely die, but that deliverance shall not be in the way you think. Death is the wages of sin, yet I bring life to the sinner, everlasting life, life through the belief of the truth, even as death came through the belief of a lie. He says, Yes, ye shall be as gods, but not in your way will make you partakers of the divine nature, not by eating the forbidden tree, but by eating of Him whose flesh is meat indeed and whose blood is drink indeed.

What stress God lays on truth, and on our believing it! What sin He declares to be in a lie and in our believing it! All untruth, all error, all false doctrine, as well as false statement, has in it the nature of a lie. Men in our day think man is not responsible for the truth, and that there is no sin in the reception of error. God protests against this, and calls on men to receive truth, his truth, as expounded in his one revelation! Gloriously yet awfully shall all this be manifested, when He who is THE TRUTH shall come the second time to vindicate both truth and righteousness!

LESSON 76

THE LOVE AND THE CALLING

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." – Hosea 11:1

GOD'S words to Israel by this prophet are hard and stern. Though intermixed with expressions of tenderness, as, "How shall I give thee up?" this book is full of fearful things. In the midst of these God here stops and reminds them of his love, his first love, the kindness of their youth, the time of their espousals. It was sincere and deep; all along it had been so; and all his messages by the prophets were no proof of hatred or enmity. He loved them in Abraham; he loved them in Jacob; he loved them when they went down to Egypt; he loved them in the days of their bondage; and he showed his love in calling him, even Israel his son, his first-born, out of Egypt. The deliverance from Egypt was always in after ages the great standing proof to which God appealed, of his love: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

This calling out of Egypt was done more than once. The most marvelous was that under Moses; but in later times, when they were carried into Egypt, God interposed and called them out. Neither Egypt nor Babylon was to be the home of his people; only a sojourn, a place of exile; no more. Out of it they must be called. They whom God did not love might remain there; they whom he loved could not be allowed to do so. Servants or friends might, but not sons. For sons there was Canaan and Jerusalem, the land flowing with milk and honey.

The last fulfilling or "filling up" of these words was in the case of God's only-begotten Son. Israel's history was the rehearsal of this. He was in certain points to tread in their steps, to go over their history in himself. And what a closeness of connection, what a oneness between Him and them does this imply! Thus in him many words of the prophets received a filling up, a completion, an exhaustion, which makes everyone who reads feel how true, how accurate, how overflowingly full are the words of God. It is not by accommodation, or allusion, or figure that these words are applied to Christ. No; in him they receive their last filling up, their perfect accomplishment; the last drop of the purposed metal is poured into the mold; it can contain no more; it needs no more. Then was that fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Egypt was not to be the home of Jesus; and yet it was to have the honor of sheltering him; yes, sheltering him when Israel cast him out.

But out of it he must be called. God's purpose and God's word demanded it. O marvelous fullness of the divine word! O superhuman perfection of exactness in each announcement! Not one jot or tittle fails! Heaven and earth may pass; star after star may be broken or blotted out; but the divine word remains unharmed and glorious amid the universal wreck. All that is on earth of beauty and excellence may come to nothing; the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever!

In both these cases we see the word literally fulfilled. The nation of God and the Son of God were called out of the land of Egypt and the house of bondage.

Why this calling? Could they not remain? Was not Goshen as fruitful as Canaan? In the case of the Son of God the reason is obvious. It was in no sense his home or native land. He had fled to it for shelter, and it had received him, even as it did Israel at first. But he had work to do elsewhere; work which could not be done in Egypt. It was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that he was sent. In the case of Israel, we may say also, they could not remain. Though born in Egypt, it was not their true home. They were the heirs of another heritage, given by God himself; they too had work to do which could not be done in Egypt; there was a purpose to be fulfilled in them by their settlement in Canaan; too long connection with Egypt would have corrupted them with its idolatry, and worldliness, and pleasures; they had a testimony to bear in behalf of the true God which could not be borne in Egypt, so that even though they had never been oppressed, they could not have remained. It was to Jerusalem, to Canaan, to Zion, to Lebanon that they were bound. Not out of the Nile, but of Jordan, are they to drink; with streams from Lebanon are they to quench their thirst. Whatever attractions Egypt might have (in the case of Moses it was riches, and royalty, and learning, and luxurious ease), they must not tarry; nor look behind, like Lot's wife; nor sigh, as they did afterwards in the desert, for its carnal plenty.

But the word is for us figuratively what it was for Israel literally. It is for us, for we are one with Israel, and one with the Son of God. Out of Egypt the church is called; each chosen one, each saint, each son, each Israelite indeed is called. Let us consider our history under the following headings: (1.) Our birthplace; (2.) Our calling; (3.) Our journey; (4.) Our home.

1. OUR BIRTHPLACE.

It is this Egypt world, "this present evil world." It is evil, yet it is fair to look upon, with its pleasures, its gaieties, its riches, its glories, its pomps,

its glitter, its songs, its magnificent palaces and gorgeous array. Egypt was one of the best specimens of the world. Into it were gathered all the world's wealth, and art, and science, and philosophy, and splendor of every kind. It was a fascinating region; every object in it magnetic to the natural man, and intoxicating to the unregenerate heart. Everything was there but the true God. The world's religion was there decked out in its goodness of temple, picture, statue, and image of every kind. The world's wisdom was all there; its astronomy, its natural science, its mechanical arts, its architecture, its skill in ornament, with all fascinations for the natural man, all stimulants for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. All natural knowledge, natural beauty, natural progress, are here; intellect, power, greatness, pomp, splendor, all are here. Yet amid all these the true God is not. Human intellect is at its highest, religion at its lowest! The world by wisdom knows not God. All idolatry, of the vilest and most foolish kind, is here. All sensuality, oppression, wickedness are here! As was Egypt, so is this world! It is this "present evil world"; it "lieth in wickedness"; and it is our birthplace. Not Bethlehem, as in the case of the Son of God, nor Jerusalem, but Egypt is our birthplace. Children of wrath; sons of the evil one; born in sin, these are the figures which describe us. We are by nature men of Egypt.

2. OUR CALLING.

We did not rise and flee of ourselves. We would have remained there forever. We loved Egypt, and delighted in its vanities. It was the home of our hearts. But God called us. He "called us with an holy calling." He called us as he did Abraham out of Ur; as he did Israel out of Egypt; as he did the fishermen out of their boats. With his own almighty voice he called us. We could not but obey. It was irresistible. Hence He made us willing in the day of his power. Many voices within and without had called us. Conscience said, Arise, and depart. The soul's deep longings after something higher said the same. Every pain, trial, disappointment, vexation, bereavement said, Arise, and depart. But all these failed. Then God spoke the word, and we found it irresistible, He spoke, and it was done. Then all those former voices which we had up until now slighted gathered strength. Pain, grief, weariness, affliction, all spoke out now; and God spoke in them. Even the feeblest voice of all seemed irresistible. It was not so much one call as a thousand; each one irresistible. Yes, out of Egypt God called us. Blessed and holy calling!

3. OUR JOURNEY.

It is through the desert. Not at once into the kingdom; not at once to heaven; but circuitously. And this long round, not for smoothness, but for roughness! It is a waste howling wilderness; a land of barrenness, of heat, of thirst, and hunger, and weariness. It is the right path, for God is our leader; it is safe, for God is our keeper; it is blessed, for God is our companion; but still it is rough, and dark, and dreary. Yet it is needful, (1.) The length of it is needful, that patience may have her perfect work; (2.) the roughness of it is needful, that we may be purified; (3.) the intricacies of it are needful, that God may have his opportunities for guiding us; (4.) the darkness of it is needful, that Christ may be realized as the sun; (5.) the sorrow of it is needful, that the Holy Spirit may be known as the Comforter. How much less should we know of God and of ourselves were this journey different! How much should we lose were we taken at once into the kingdom; as there can be no second opportunity hereafter of going over the way again! Let us prize the journey in all its aspects.

4. OUR HOME.

Canaan is our Promised Land, and Jerusalem our city. For God has prepared for us both a land and a city; a home for eternity; not merely better than the desert, but better than Egypt; a home that more than makes up for all that we have left behind; eternal in the heavens, an incorruptible inheritance; the many mansions; God's home and ours; Christ's home and the church's forever; better than the earthly Jerusalem or the earthly paradise; in which we shall never be disturbed; from which we cannot be driven; in which we can neither be tempted nor sin; everlasting and glorious. It is to that we are bound, and we lay up our treasure there.

It is love that has done all this: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." God's love has done it! It is love that calls us out and draws us out; the mighty love of God. It is love that takes us as we are, and which we are to take as it is. It is love like that to Abraham and to Israel. It is the love of the shepherd to his sheep; of the woman to her lost piece of silver; of the father to his lost son. It is love to which he himself bears witness: "I loved him," loved him even from the days of his childhood. It is love exhibited in the cross; love realized in the tens of thousands that have been called out of Egypt by it.

LESSON 77

THE ANGER AND THE GOODNESS

"Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him." – Nahum 1:6-7

THROUGHOUT this chapter, and particularly in these verses, let us note these two things, (1.) God's anger, (2.) God's goodness. They stand out very strongly in this "burden."

1. GOD'S ANGER.

(1.) It is real. There is such a thing as anger in God. Many are the expressions used concerning it both in this chapter and elsewhere, jealousy, vengeance, fury, wrath; all to indicate its existence, and to show us that the human theories of divine universal benevolence are not true; being got up for a purpose, and that purpose to persuade the sinner's own conscience that he need not be alarmed because of his guilt; and that no one need dread the infliction of punishment, except perhaps a few of the most wicked of our race. But God's words are neither exaggerations, nor words of course. There is a terrible truth contained in these oft repeated words of Scripture, "His anger was kindled." Loving and gracious as God is, his anger is real. When Jesus comes the second time he comes to "take vengeance."

(2.) It is righteous. It is not the rage of selfishness, or passion, or affront. It is judicial anger; the anger of the righteous judge. It is anger against sin, against the sinner; anger because of insulted law and dishonored righteousness. Nothing in it is unjust, or cruel, or arbitrary. Then the condemned soul will be compelled hereafter to say, it was all right and just; it shall be right and just for all eternity.

(3.) It is terrible. Though calm, it is unutterably awful; even, overwhelming. No power and no numbers shall be able to stand before it. It shall sweep everything before it like a whirlwind. The expulsion from Paradise, the deluge, the ruin of Sodom, are specimens of its terribleness. The lost soul shall be utterly overwhelmed.

(4.) It is inexorable. Nothing shall turn it aside or soften it when once it is kindled. "The vengeance of eternal fire," the "everlasting

burnings," the "worm that dieth not," these are awful words. No bribery, no argument, no influence shall prevail. Nor pity to the poor soul. God will forget to be gracious; repentance shall be hid from his eyes.

O anger of God, how real, how righteous, how terrible, how inexorable! Yet, let me say one thing, should you be one of the eternally lost, and should you, in the course of your weary and tormented eternity, say to yourself, Oh that God were not so just; then think what a wish that would be for yourself. Your security against unjust and over-severe punishment is that very justice against which you petition. Bad as your case may be at the hands of a just God, it would be unspeakably worse at the hands of an unjust God. The anger of a righteous God is no doubt terrible, but the unbridled fury of an unrighteous God is something too horrible even to think upon.

2. GOD'S GOODNESS.

He is good, and he does good. He is kind to the unthankful and the unworthy. God is love. God loves the sinner.

(1.) His goodness is sincere. He does not utter words of course, nor pretend to feelings which are not in him. His words mean just what they say; his deeds mean just what they indicate; the works of his hands have a most substantial and authentic expression of goodness. God is not a man that he should lie, either in his words of goodness or of anger.

(2.) It is powerful. It is Almighty goodness. He is able to deliver those whom he loves. Their interests are safe in his hands. "He is slow to anger, and great in power." Who can withstand his love? "It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth?"

(3.) It is watchful. His eye is on us at all times, especially in the day of trouble. His is watchful goodness. His is the unsleeping eye, and the untiring hand. He is not weary of blessing. He delights in opportunities for pouring out his love; and our extremities are his opportunities.

(4.) It is unchanging. Like himself, his goodness is without variableness; not ebbing and flowing, but always flowing. His heart is the heart of the unchangeable one. Not like the tides, or the seasons; but like the sky above us, ever one calm arch of gentle, loving azure,

embracing earth.

Such is the God with whom we have the privilege of being in relationship with. He is righteous and cannot allow sin to go uncondemned and unpunished. Yet is he good and gracious, not willing to destroy or to take vengeance; a God before whom the sinner may tremble; a God in whom the chief of sinners may find forgiveness. I remind you of two passages which will form the practical improvement of all I have said.

(1.) "The great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand!" It is not yet come; but it is coming. Judgment lingers not, damnation slumbers not. It will be a day of terror for the sinner when the pent up wrath of God shall pour itself out, not in seven vials, or seventy times seven, but in an eternity of vials without number.

(2.) "He is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Such is his goodness now. He is rich in mercy. His patience is beyond all conception or measure. And in his longsuffering there is salvation, salvation to the uttermost. He pities, yearns, pleads, beseeches, spares, prolongs the day of grace, presents pardon, salvation, life to the ungodliest, free. Yes, freely to the last! Let this longsuffering goodness draw us, melt us, awaken confidence, and win us to love.

LESSON 78

DARKNESS PURSUING THE SINNER

"Darkness shall pursue his enemies." – Nahum 1:8

IT is of Nineveh and Assyria that this prophet utters his fearful burden. That city and its inhabitants were to bear the judgments of God. It was to be swept from the earth, and they were to be driven out, pursued by destruction from the Lord. "The Assyrian" was Israel's great enemy, God's great enemy; type of the Church's great enemy in the last days. The capital city had been warned, had repented, and had returned like the dog to its vomit. Now the last blast of the prophetic trumpet is sounded; a warning to Nineveh, a consolation to Israel. Darkness has settled down on Nineveh from that day to this, and has pursued its dwellers, a type and earnest of the blackness of darkness forever.

Let us take Assyria as a specimen of sinners; and this prediction as a declaration of God's way of dealing with them.

1. A SINNER IS AN ENEMY TO GOD.

This is a strong word, and worthy of solemn thought. It means much. Scripture speaks of the sinner as, (1.) not loving God; (2.) forgetting God; (3.) disobeying God; (4.) departing from God. But this is more than all these; stronger, more decided, more terrible. It means such things as the following:

(1.) He hates God. Hater of God is his name; hater of Christ also, hater of his whole being, his righteousness, his truth, his holiness, his power, his sovereignty, indeed, his love.

(2.) He tries to injure God. He would carry his hatred into effect by injury, in every way; he robs God, he mocks God, he tries to dethrone Him, and to oppose Him.

(3.) He tries to make away with God. Enmity, when it runs its course, ends in murder. So man, if he could, would take the life of God. When the fool says in his heart there is no God, he speaks as a murderer. When the Son of God came to earth, they did not rest until they had slain him. Crucify him, crucify him, was a cry, the intensity of whose bitterness and malignity arose from the suspicion in the hearts of the Jews that he was really the Son of God.

Thus every sinner is an enemy of God, an injurer, a rebel, a robber, a murderer. All sin is the indication of this, and when fully carried out ends in this. And all unbelief is crucifixion of the Son of God.

2. GOD MEANS TO DEAL WITH HIS ENEMIES.

He is not indifferent to their hostility, he is not blind to it, he does not mean to overlook it. But he is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish. He wishes to give them time to repent; he tries by this love of his to melt them, but, if all fail, he will at length arise and deal with them. They shall know his power and righteousness, his wrath and vengeance. Darkness shall pursue his enemies. He does not use many words, nor strong language; the threat here is very decided no doubt, but it is very calm; all the more terrible and certain from being so calm. It refers both to time and eternity; present darkness, eternal darkness.

(1.) There is darkness in store for the sinner. It is not fire or torment that is here spoken of, it is simply darkness. As such it is, (1.) The absence of all that gives health, and gladness, and life; for without light there is no life, no lushness, no bloom, either for man or man's earth. A world without a sun! How dismal! (2.) The presence of that which produces gloom, uncertainty, perplexity, terror, despair. How cheerless is a cloudy day; how much more days of never-ending cloud and darkness. No knowledge of the way, groping perpetually, exposure to dangers and enemies. How dismal would life be with nothing but darkness! Yet such is the portion of God's enemies! They have rejected the light of the world, and darkness must be their lot, a common lot with him who is the prince of darkness.

(2.) This darkness is from God. It does not come by chance, nor from man, nor from natural causes. It is produced and sent by Him who has both light and darkness at disposal. It comes as punishment, especially for their rejection of the light. Darkness coming in any way is sad, but coming from God it is infinitely terrible. We must go astray, we must stumble, we must wander forever. O enemy of God, think what it will be to be enveloped in darkness and followed by darkness forever.

(3.) This darkness shall pursue them. It shall be to them as an enemy, or as a beast of prey, ever following them, seeking their destruction. Wherever they go this darkness shall be upon their heels, and they shall not escape. In vain shall they seek for light, gross darkness shall compass them about. Eternal darkness shall be their portion, the

blackness of darkness forever. Darkness like a rushing whirlwind shall sweep them before it, "they shall be driven to darkness."

(4.) Every enemy of God must expect this. It is a certainty. It is not possible to be an enemy of God and yet escape the darkness. However swiftly they may flee, the darkness shall overtake them like a tempest. Their hatred to God must be avenged! For the darkness does not come at random; it follows in the track of the hostility. It marks the enemy, and follows him; it finds him and pursues him.

LESSON 79

JERUSALEM THE CENTER OF THE WORLD'S PEACE

"In this place will I give peace, says the Lord of hosts." – Haggai 2:9

IT is to something still future that this whole passage refers. Thus Paul expounds it, "Now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven" (Heb. 12:26). There was a shaking at Sinai; there is yet to be a greater and more universal shaking; there is to be the removal of the things that are shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain; and out of these shakings and removings, the successive dissolutions of the four Gentile monarchies, there comes the kingdom that cannot be moved, the "everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, the kingdom which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14); the great "fifth monarchy" which shall stand forever. There is to be a more stable kingdom than earth has ever seen, under the scepter of the righteous King. There is to be another Jerusalem, more firmly built than that of David and Solomon. There is to be another house more glorious than the temple of old. Both Israel and the church look for something more blessed, more excellent, and more enduring than eye has yet seen. For this it is that we must wait the advent of the great Melchizedek, with his "royal priesthood;" the arrival of the new heavens and earth wherein dwells righteousness. Then shall the words of our text be fulfilled, "In this place will I give peace." Here we learn, (1.) Man needs peace; (2.) Peace is the gift of the Lord of hosts; (3.) Peace is given in connection with Israel's house; (4.) Peace is to be specially given at the special time here predicted.

1. MAN NEEDS PEACE.

He had it at first, but he flung away the pearl. Since then all has been trouble and variance. God and he are not at peace. His fellowman and he are not at peace. Discord, war, confusion, hatred are everywhere. Yes; man needs peace; man's earth needs peace; creation needs peace; the animals that dwell on man's earth need peace. Israel needs peace; Israel's land needs peace. There is a cry for peace, often unconscious and inarticulate, everywhere. The whole creation groans. It cries for rest. For unrest is the condition into which sin has brought man and man's earth, with all that it contains. "There is no peace." Yet man was made for peace; creation was made for peace. How sorely has this peace been

needed! How deeply has the want of it been felt these many ages, ages of unrest.

2. PEACE IS THE GIFT OF THE LORD OF HOSTS.

One of God's special names is, "the God of peace." Man can break the peace, but cannot restore it. Peace seems a small thing; yet it is so great that only He whose name is "God of hosts" can give it. Man can neither make it nor purchase it. God must do both. "I create peace." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." It is the free gift of Omnipotence. It is the free gift of Him who, as the Lord of hosts, the Captain of God's hosts, has fought our fight, overthrown our enemies, wrought righteousness in our behalf, secured peace for us. At his birth, "peace on earth" was proclaimed. He went about as the peacemaker. He died to make peace by the blood of his cross. He is our peace, who has made both one. For man, for Israel, for man's earth, for creation He has purchased peace; and this purchased peace He is yet to give. Glorious gift for a weary, unrestful world! Peace, peace, to him that is far off, and to him that is near. He gives it to his church now; he will give it before long to the whole earth.

3. PEACE IS GIVEN IN CONNECTION WITH ISRAEL'S TEMPLE.

The place of peace was strictly the altar. Here the pacification was accomplished, for here the propitiation was made. From the beginning the altar was set up, and the bloodshed, in token of peace. Afterwards the altar was enclosed in a tabernacle, and again in a temple. From these came out the voice of peace from the Lord of hosts. Then He showed Himself as the peacemaker. His peace was always in connection with his temple. No altar, no peace. No blood, no peace. These, of course, were symbols, figures, shadows of good things to come. In the fullness of time He came who is temple, and altar, and sacrifice, and peace, all in one. He is our priest. He, as priest in his own house, gives peace. It is peace proceeding from himself as the Lord of hosts.

It is royal and priestly peace; peace flowing from the righteous removal of all that which had broken up our peace; peace which shall never again be broken, because its foundations are stable and divine; peace unchangeable and everlasting.

4. PEACE IS TO BE SPECIFICALLY GIVEN AT THE TIME AND IN THE PLACE HERE SIGNIFIED.

Though peace has been secured, the work being done which pacifies, not to be done again, yet peace is as yet but partially given. A few here and there are reconciled to God; that is all. The world still remains without peace. There is still distance, variance, controversy between man and God. There is still tumult, and storm, and bitterness on earth. Man and man's earth, as a whole, are just what they were. But our text foretells a time when all shall be pacified. Then shall peace be universal on earth; peace in Israel's land; peace in Jerusalem; peace issuing from the house of the Lord of hosts. Creation shall have peace. The curse shall depart. Evil passions among men shall cease. The beasts of field and forest shall have peace. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Isa. 11:6). There shall be nothing to hurt nor to destroy in all the holy mountain. The center and fountain-head of all this harmony, and love, and peace, shall be Salem the city of peace; and the house of God, the dwelling place. Living waters, waters of health and peace, shall go forth from Jerusalem; not only throughout the land, but to the ends of the earth. That city shall be earth's holy and blessed metropolis, from which all peace is to proceed. "In this place will I give peace, says the Lord of hosts." The Prince of peace, the true Solomon, shall be the giver and dispenser of that peace to a happy city, a happy land, a happy world, a happy race. What a scene of order, rest, holiness, and beauty, when Jesus reigns, and all things are put under him.

Therefore this is what we preach”

(1.) Peace. Not man's peace, nor man-made peace, nor church-made peace; but divine peace, God-made peace; the peace of God; peace from God; peace in God; peace from the God of peace. Receive the peace-proclaiming testimony, the gospel of peace, and be at peace.

(2.) Peace through Jesus Christ. It is from him that all peace proceeds. He is the peace-maker, the peace-purchaser, and the peace-giver. It is with him personally that we must deal in order to obtain it. Go to him for it. It is free. Take it from his hand.

(3.) Peace now. Yes; we preach a present peace; immediate and sure; without working or waiting; simply in believing God's testimony to the work which has made peace; to the blood which has secured the reconciliation; to the love which has done all we need.

(4.) Peace the earnest of a world-wide peace. As God is now giving peace to souls, before long he will give it to the whole earth. And we

accept our "peace in believing" as the earnest of a coming day of wider and more glorious peace. He who has given peace to us, will before long give peace to the world. This is our hope, in the midst of convulsion, and war, and tempest. Come, O Prince of peace; set up your kingdom of peace; reign in peace over this troubled world. Come, put on thy crown of peace. Earth has long been without you, and without your peace. Make haste; come yourself; and bring with you your everlasting peace.

LESSON 80

JERUSALEM AND HER KING

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the heathen; and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." – Zechariah 9:9-10

IT is over a wide span of time and history that these two verses stretch. They predict the scenes of Messiah's first and second comings. There is a long, long interval between the events of the ninth verse and those of the tenth. The former has been already fulfilled (and that how literally!), over 20 centuries ago; the latter yet waits to be fulfilled. The former is a glimpse of Messiah's humiliation, the latter of his exaltation, and power, and glory. He came the first time to be despised and rejected of men; He comes the second time to triumph and to reign. Jerusalem has seen his lowliness, it is yet to see his majesty. It has witnessed his cross, it is yet to behold his throne.

Let us note here, (1.) Jerusalem's joy; (2.) Jerusalem's King; (3.) Jerusalem's glory.

1. JERUSALEM'S JOY.

Zion and Jerusalem are the two different parts of the one city, the city of the great King. It is the inhabitants or daughters of this twofold city that are here summoned to "rejoicing" and "shouting," to "great" rejoicing, and to the loud utterance of it. To gladness and shouting is the city called by God. It is "the joyous city." Babylon may mourn, but Zion must rejoice. Egypt may howl, Jerusalem must shout. They who have received Messiah are inhabitants of no mean city. To them belongs the heavenly Jerusalem, the everlasting Zion. Their citizenship is in heaven. They are not yet in the city, but they are looking for it. And the prospect of it is enough to make them rejoice and shout. O Christian, be glad. Do not have a heavy heart. He who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and the citizen of the joyous city.

2. JERUSALEM'S KING.

It is written elsewhere, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King" (Psa. 149:2). So here. Let us take each of the words relating to the King, in order.

(1.) Behold. It is the prophet speaking to his fellow citizens, it is the Holy Spirit turning our eyes to Jesus. "Behold!" See this great sight. What is there on earth to be compared to it?

(2.) Thy King. Jerusalem has a King. He is "the great King," "King of kings," "King of Israel," "King of nations," "Prince of the kings of the earth." His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He is "the Word made flesh," God-man, "Emmanuel, God with us." She is now kingless. She has no David, no Solomon, no Hezekiah. Yet to her really belongs a King, greater than all the kings of earth, "THY King."

(3.) Cometh. He was long "the coming one," now he is "come." For four thousand years the promise spoke of his coming. Now he comes at length! He tarries no longer. His feet tread our earth. His eyes look on our hills and skies.

Bethlehem receives him Nazareth gives him a home. Bethany welcomes. Jerusalem shouts hosanna at his approach. But he has left! He is not now here. He is now "the coming One" again. And he may soon be here. Behold he cometh!

(4.) Unto thee. Yes; especially to thee. Jerusalem is to reject him, to crucify him. He knows this, but he comes to her. O sinner, he comes to you and he bids you come to him. He does not stand far off, he comes near.

(5.) Just and having salvation. A just God and a Savior. Just and the Justifier. The Savior and the Justifier, because he is the Just One. He came with a righteous salvation for unrighteous men. He presents that righteous salvation still. It is salvation to the uttermost. He is mighty to save, he is just to save! He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Oh good news. The righteous One loves the unrighteous. Jesus Christ the righteous came into the world to save sinners.

(6.) Lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. He is meek and lowly; and even when he comes to Jerusalem in triumph, he shows his meekness by the way in which he comes. No troops of soldiers; no guards; no procession; no banners waving! No chariot, no war horse! He rides upon an ass, and alongside there is the

colt, just as they were found, unprepared and unadorned. He is at once the loftiest and the lowliest of the sons of men. None ever came from such a height, or went down to such a depth. In birth, and life, and death he was alike the lowly One. May he not well say, then, "Come unto me," and "learn of me." He is distant to none. He repulses none. Even to the little ones he says, "Suffer them to come to me." In word, and look, and action, he is infinitely attractive to all. No one needs to dread him, nor to stand aloof in suspicion or distrust. O sinner, come and learn of this lowly one. He will give you rest. O Christian, trust Him more. Do not misinterpret him or do him injustice. Give Him your fullest confidence, in spite of all the evil, and the darkness, and the folly that are in you. Keep ever near his side. Look at him, love him, speak to him, trust him.

3. JERUSALEM'S GLORY.

The first feature of this glory is the cessation of war, and the destruction of all the implements of war, chariot, horse, and battle-bow. No more of these. Jerusalem is now the city of peace, the true Salem. But there is peace to the heathen too: he speaks peace to them, "peace to them that are afar off." The sound of peace goes out from Salem to the whole world. Jerusalem is now a quiet habitation; peace is in all her borders; the heathen share it; and universal dominion now belongs to Zion's King. The earth is his as well as Jerusalem. He is King of kings. As yet this has not been fulfilled. Satan still roams and reigns. The kingdoms of this world are still unchristian or antichristian.

But the vision will not lie. Jesus is coming the second time to fulfill these words. He fulfilled the ninth verse at his first coming; he is to fulfill the tenth at his second. He comes as King as well as Savior. He comes not only to judge, but to reign. He comes to end all war; to bind Satan; to smite antichrist; to renew creation; to rebuild Jerusalem; to restore Israel; to convert the nations; to reign in peace as earth's righteous King. His dominion shall be as universal as it is everlasting. His kingdom is that which cannot be moved. Then shall be the long expected reign of righteousness and peace.

LESSON 81

LOOKING TO THE PIERCED ONE

"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." – Zechariah 12:10

LET us take up this passage under the following heads, which will bring out all its parts: (1.) the pierced one; (2.) the piercers; (3.) the lookers; (4.) the mourners.

1. THE PIERCED ONE.

Messiah, the seed of the woman; the man with the bruised heel; he is the pierced one. It is He, Himself, who speaks. He was pierced by the nails and by the spear; by the nails to effect his death, by the spear to prove it; both of these, the exhibitions of man's hatred, before and after death. It is as the pierced one that we see him in the twenty-second Psalm and in the fifty-third of Isaiah; as such on the cross; as such in heaven, the Lamb slain. Divine yet human; human yet divine; both of these perfectly; human, that he might be pierced; divine, that his piercing might be effectual. By his stripes we are healed.

2. THE PIERCERS.

These in the first place are the Jews and the Romans, at the cross; Jew and Gentile uniting in this act, the Jew the planner and counselor, the Gentile the executioner. It was the united hatred of Jew and Gentile that did the deed. The crowd surrounding the cross, they are consenting and partaking, and all to whom the proclamation of this piercing comes, who do not come out from the crowd and protest against the deed by believing in the pierced one. In this way it is that the entire world is guilty of the deed.

3. THE LOOKERS.

In one sense the first piercers were lookers. They looked and pierced; they pierced and looked. But that looking produced no change; they looked and hated only the more. Jew and Gentile then looked, but they remained the same. The lookers in our text are not those who surrounded the cross, but those who came afterwards, not looking at the actual cross, but listening to the story of the pierced one. How idly they talk who say,

Had we seen the cross we should have been melted down! At Pentecost we find these lookers; in many places, and times, and ages we find them; we find them still. In the latter day our text is to be more fully verified to Jew and Gentile, "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him," i.e., look upon him. The whole world shall be lookers then, "every eye." In our day we may say that it is by the ear we look; it is the record that brings the cross before the eye, and presents to us the pierced one. We preach the story of the cross and say, Look!

4. THE MOURNERS.

The actual piercers at the cross did not mourn; they railed and wagged their heads; the sight of the pierced one then produced only hatred and mockery. A man might see the cross and remain hardhearted. The cross and the crucifix in themselves can do nothing for a soul. Yet the pierced one is the object to which God turns our eye. It is of him that the Holy Spirit makes use in breaking the hard heart and binding up the broken one. He does not work save in connection with the cross of Christ. He uses the cross for producing godly sorrow. Mark,

(1.) The sorrow here referred to is very deep. It is like mourning for an only son; it is like the bitterness of soul for a first-born. It is not the sorrow of a moment or an hour, but prolonged; not surface-sorrow, but deep; not sentimentalism, but genuine grief, the grief of the whole man.

(2.) It is sorrow produced by the Holy Spirit. His hand is in it; else we might look a thousand times over at the cross and remain unmoved. It is not the sorrow produced by pictures, or statues, or the sight of Sinai or Jerusalem, or harrowing descriptions, or sad poetry, or plaintive music, like the "Miserere" of Rome, or by the darkness of a gloomy chamber, these are artificial and mechanical ways of calling up apparent religious feeling; but it is only the sorrow of the world which works death, not godly sorrow working repentance unto life, nor is it even so deep as that of Judas when he said, "I have sinned." It is man-made conviction, if it be conviction at all, not the sorrow of the Holy Spirit.

(3.) It is sorrow flowing from looking at the pierced one. We do not first mourn and then look; we look and mourn. Not the one without the other; and not the mourning before the looking. Many, in their self-righteousness, would first mourn, and then carry their mourning to God as a recommendation. But there is no sorrow genuine save that

which flows directly from looking at the pierced one. What do we see in this pierced one that produces such a result?

1. We see infinite love. This melts the heart and draws tears from the eyes. It is love that is bleeding on that cross.
2. We see our own rejection of that love. We have long been rejecters, despisers of it. Our years of rejection come up before us and fill us with bitterness. What, so long despise such love!
3. We see suffering. It is suffering beyond all suffering of man. It is the suffering of love. The sufferer is love itself. He suffers because he loves. He loves and suffers!
4. We see that suffering caused by ourselves. We not only rejected the love, but we nailed the loving sufferer to the tree. This is sin; this is our sin. We are the murderers. We hated, mocked, nailed, slew. Oh, what sin is ours; and what must sin be! Yet hear his voice, "Look unto me, and be ye saved!"

LESSON 82

THE HOLINESS OF COMMON THINGS

"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts:" – Zechariah 14:20-21

IT is of millennial days that the prophet is speaking; days when Paradise shall be restored, and earth shall be as heaven; when Israel shall be restored, Jerusalem rebuilt, and the great kingdom set up that cannot be moved.

Of this period it is the holiness that he specifically points to; so unlike everything in Jerusalem or on the earth in preceding days. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," shall then be the burden of every song. Jerusalem shall be truly what it is now, and has been up until now, but in name, "the holy city."

1. THE PROCLAMATION OF HOLINESS.

But it is the holiness of common things that he yet more particularly dwells on. Not merely holy men, or holy service, or holy songs, or holy Sabbaths; but holy vessels of every kind; holy bells (or bridles), holy pots, holy bowls, with the holy use of all these; so that every sight and sound shall proclaim holiness. On wall, and gate, and bar, on houses, and doors, and posts, and lintel, shall be inscribed "holiness." On leaf, and flower, and tree shall be holiness.

The following paraphrase will bring out the exact meaning of each clause. "In that day shall there be even upon such common things as the horse-bells, holiness unto the Lord; every vessel in the temple shall be holy, and even the common boiling pots shall be as sacred as the altar-bowls; indeed, not the temple-pots alone, but every pot in Jerusalem and throughout the land shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts; and all they that come from afar to sacrifice shall make use of them: and there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts."

Thus the commonest of common things are selected to illustrate the great truth or fact of that day, viz., the universality of consecration. Nothing

shall be left unsanctified. Everything shall be for God; everything shall glorify him; exhibiting the full meaning of the text, "Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God."

2. THE RECOGNITION OF WHAT IS TRULY HOLY.

It is not then the spiritual nature of the things themselves that is needed for the consecration. The things named are evidently chosen to prevent that mistake. It is of the holiness of things that are not in themselves spiritual that the prophet speaks. These common things we are to lift up out of their low position, to ennoble and dignify them.

And how is this to be done? Not by changing their nature; not by spiritualizing them. But by the right use of them. By connecting them with God, and God with them. By refastening the link between the material and the spiritual; not by transforming the material into the spiritual. It is the right use of common things, in connection with God, that is the true consecration. They are not consecrated by some mysterious process, in order to their glorifying God; but the right use of them in the service of God is the true consecration.

God is here dealing with us about common daily things; common, daily, and as men would say, carnal duties. He wants,

Holiness in our common works and words; our eating and drinking; our plowing, and sowing, and reaping; holiness in the shop, holiness in the market-place; holiness in each room of the house; in journeying and in resting, in buying and selling; holiness in the airplane, and upon the highway; holiness in our reading, our conversation, and our letter-writing; holiness in our business, and our recreation; holiness in our laughter, in our feasts, in our ordinary interactions. All our common works so done that God shall be glorified in them. Many forget all this. They think that a religious life should omit as many as possible of common duties, whereas it is by the right doing of these that we are to exemplify true religion. A religious life is not a life by itself, the life of a recluse or hermit; it is common life sanctified. Many say, Were I but a minister, with nothing to do but with religious subjects and acts, it would be well. Ah, a minister has not the opportunities of glorifying God which others have; he has not so many of life's every-day duties to discharge. Or they say, Had I more time to spare, I could glorify God more. Ah, it is seldom the idle man, the man of leisure, that does this. A life of leisure is not so easily managed or sanctified as many think; self comes in; irregularities come in; time is not properly valued; efforts are unfocused. It needs much grace to regulate

and lay out for God a life of leisure. There is much meaning in the words, "six days shall thou labor."

The little things of life are to be attended to; the common, menial, earthly things. In these Adam served God when he tilled the ground; Abel when he kept sheep; Amos when he gathered sycamore fruit; Joseph when he produced as a carpenter; Paul when he made tents. It is in this way that we are to glorify God, inscribing "holiness to the Lord" on everything we do; so transacting daily business that men shall say of us, "They fear God;" so making our plans that in them God shall always have a place; so speaking the little or common words of each hour, that men shall recognize in us the servants of God. It is easy, and it is well, to hang up a text upon the walls of our chamber; but let our words and deeds be a continual recognition of the holy Lord God, and this shall be more effective. Let us make ourselves the texts. Regulate your house (with every room in it) so that it shall speak of God. Make your family arrangements such that they shall all speak of God. It is not at family worship, or in asking a blessing, alone that God is to be seen. These are mockeries, if he be left out of all the rest of the day. Let him be everywhere seen and felt. Do all to his glory. While consecrating common things, beware of profaning holy things. Reverence and godly fear become us in dealing with all that is divine.

LESSON 83

WEARYING GOD WITH OUR WORDS

"Ye have wearied the Lord with your words: yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" – Malachi 2:17

THE prophet's charge against Israel is of "wearying the Lord"; as Isaiah had long before this said to Ahaz, "Will ye weary my God also?" And while God charged them with wearying him, he solemnly denies having wearied them, and asks, Wherein have I wearied thee?

The charge is not of "provoking," but of "wearying"; and is one of deeply-touching sadness, indicating sorrow, patience, longsuffering, love, the profound affection of a heart that yearns over unworthy objects, unwilling to abandon them to their deserved doom, that bears all things, believeth all things, hopes all things, endures all things, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil.

There are many ways in which we weary God. Such as, by our

- (1.) Carelessness. Worldliness, love of self, and vanity, and folly.
- (2.) Opposition. Dislike of himself, his law, his gospel.
- (3.) Unteachableness. Foolishness, hardness of heart, perversity.
- (4.) Unbelief. Distrust of himself, rejection of his love.
- (5.) Want of zeal. "This did I for thee, what doest thou for me."
- (6.) Inconsistency. Life and creed at variance. A name, no more.

In many such ways we weary God continually; we anger, grieve, resist, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To this wearying he might at once put an end, and refuse to be treated like this by us any longer. But he has long patience, he bears much before he interposes in his wrath. Knowing the fearful consequences to us of his being worn out by us and allowing righteousness and vengeance to do their work, he waits, and pities, and entreats, and admonishes with us to the last.

The prophet's words, "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments," are expressive of this feeling; and our Lord's tears over Jerusalem are the intimation at once of God's unutterable patience, and of the exhaustion of it at last.

But let us mark the particular kind of wearying, to which the prophet points.

1. IT IS WEARYING WITH WORDS.

"Ye have wearied me with your words" Words in themselves do not weary God. They are pleasant sounds. He delights in listening to what his creatures say. All sights and sounds, coming from the works of his hands, are meant to be "good": sunshine, starlight, earth's green, heaven's blue, ocean's brilliance, the music of birds, the voice of the wind, the roar of the thunder, the noise of many waters, these are among the things which He pronounced "good." So with the human voice and human words. But when they are dissociated from the feeling within, so as not to be the expression of the heart but only of the lip; or when they are the utterance of error or falsehood, unmeaning and hollow, then they cease to be good, they displease him; and when repeated, and reiterated, they weary Him. Talk, talk, mere talk, the talk of the lips, it may be respectable, religious talk, but if mere talk, it not only wearies man but God. And think of the innumerable millions of words uttered every hour by the millions of earth, all of which go up unto the ear of God! Think of the discords, and dissonances, and impurities, and follies, and blasphemies, and hypocrisies that are hourly heard by God! Oh how He must be wearied with the words of men! How He must be grieved with the sounds of earth!

2. IT IS WEARYING BY QUESTIONS.

We say, Wherein have we wearied him? Men do not like to be challenged by God, and yet they shrink from the denial of the charge. Instead of honest confession or bold denial, they speak like Cain, and ask, Am I my brother's keeper? Wherein have I wearied him? What better way to weary God than such a course of hypocritical questioning, critical questioning, fault-finding, pretending surprise at what they could not but know they were committing. O mockery of God! For men to look up in his face, and say, Wherein have we wearied thee?

3. IT IS WEARYING BY DENIAL OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL.

One of the most explicit of all Bible teachings is as to the difference between the evil person and the good person, the evil thing and the good thing, the evil opinion and the good opinion. Man often sees little of this difference; God sees it strongly. Man likes to efface or smooth over this difference; God keeps up the line, broad, and deep, and clear, as between sea and land. He is wearied by man's assertions of the little difference between things and persons, and by man's attempts to obliterate moral and spiritual distinctions, to call light darkness and darkness light. Is not the present age wearying God in this way?

4. IT IS WEARYING BY DISBELIEF OF COMING JUDGMENT.

' "Where is the God of judgment?" is the infidel question, like that of the scoffer in the last days: "Where is the promise of his coming?" No judgment, and no God of judgment, is the watchword of many. Every man a judge to himself; a judge of all truth and error; the measurer of God, and the judge of his character and ways. This is not exactly the fool's saying, There is no god, but it is next to it; for it means that there is no god but such a one as suits man's philosophy. God's non-interposition for so many ages, and his allowance of confusion and error, lead men to conclude that there is no God of judgment. This "wearies God"; this semi-atheism; this misinterpretation of his love and patience. God's longsuffering, instead of leading to repentance, leads to unbelief.

The Lord will come. He may come soon. Let us be ready. The Judge stands before the door.

LESSON 84

DAY OF WRATH

Malachi 4:1-6

THIS is a notable specimen of a double prophecy. It contains several distinct predictions, twice or more often fulfilled; at first very partially, and then fully; at first almost apparently a failure, at last a perfect fulfillment. The center of these prophecies is Messiah himself; Messiah in connection with Israel; Messiah both in his first and second comings; the things predicted having a partial and shadowy fulfillment at his first, and awaiting an exhaustive fulfillment at his second coming. By taking these both apart and united, we shall have a clear insight into the meaning of this difficult prophecy.

In the previous chapter there is a "day" spoken of, a time of mingled wrath and grace; and it is of this "day" that the present chapter is full. It is called "the day" (ver. 1) twice over; "the day that I shall do this" (ver. 3), or, "that I shall work"; "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (ver. 5). It is the day of Christ, Messiah's day, as seen by the prophets, embracing both his first and second comings; and conjoining in one period the events of both these.

1. GOD CALLS US TO SEE THE FUTURE.

"For behold"! God calls men's heedless eyes to the events of the future. "For behold the day cometh;" yes, "the day that shall burn as a furnace;" the "day of vengeance" (Isa. 61:2; Isa. 64:2; Isa. 66:15-16). Then shall all "the proud" (Psa. 94:2-3), especially "he that exalteth himself above all that is called God" 2 Thes. 2:4; and "all that do wickedly," the wicked one and all his hosts, be "as stubble," as "chaff" (Matt. 3:12.) for the unquenchable fire. Yea, "the day that cometh shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, and leave neither root nor branch;" they "shall be utterly burned with fire" (2 Sam. 23:7). Such is "the day of the Lord" that shall come as a thief in the night (2 Pet. 3:10). To this day of fire and destruction John the Baptist referred when he began to preach repentance (Matt. 3:2-10); as if reminding the Jews of Malachi, and his awful words.

2. A REMNANT WILL BE SPARED.

In the midst of this fiery havoc there shall be a remnant "spared" (Mal. 3:17), described by the expression "you that fear my name." Yes; the

fearers of God's name are (as in the case of Noah) to be spared in the fiery deluge that is coming. Indeed, on them a glorious morning is to dawn (2 Sam. 23:4), the Sun of righteousness is to arise; not with destruction, but with "healing" in his rays or "wings," and under his welcoming warmth and light, these fearers of the Lord shall go forth as the flocks and herds to pasture. Blessed morning to those who fear the Lord and think on his name (Mal. 3:16), the "morning without clouds" (2 Sam. 23:4); ushered in by "the bright and morning star" (Rev. 2:28). This was in a measure fulfilled when Jesus came as "the light of the world;" but the full accomplishment is reserved for his second appearing.

3. THE SAINTS SHALL TRIUMPH.

Then (v. 3) shall these fearers of the Lord accompany him in executing his vengeance, "this honor have all his saints" (Psa. 149:9); for "the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment upon all" (Jude v.14). They come with their Lord to "tread down the wicked," to "tread them in anger, and trample them in fury" (Isa. 63:3; Rev. 19:15). Yes; antichrist and all his enemies, with all who "know not God and obey not his gospel," shall be "as ashes" under them in that day of fire (v. 1). Thus shall the saints triumph. Victory shall be theirs on that very earth where they were overcome and trodden on. They shall be associated with the King of kings in wielding the rod of iron (Psa. 2:9; Rev. 2:27). That day shall be one of exaltation and triumph for the fearers of the Lord, "The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom" (Dan. 7:18); and then shall the song of the redeemed be fulfilled, "Thou hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

In the fourth verse we have a statement which, while it refers most of all to Israel, applies to the world also, "Remember ye the law of Moses." It was probably to this that our Lord referred, when once and again he said, "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill." Throughout the whole dispensation that law was to be exhibited and magnified, as the law of laws, holy, just, and good. Christ himself did this in life and in death; and God, even under this dispensation of grace, cannot suffer one jot or tittle of that righteous law to be infringed. It shall stand forever.

4. THE FORERUNNER IS ANNOUNCED.

Then the forerunner is announced, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord; whether actually before it, or just about its commencement (for it is not a mere day of twenty-four hours), we know not, "I will send Elijah the prophet." As we find Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:31) receiving a

faint and partial fulfillment at Pentecost, though it awaits a fuller one hereafter; so we have a double Elias, an Elias of the first, and an Elias of the second coming. The mission of both is alike, to call Israel to repentance, and to bring the whole nation, fathers and children, into happy unity before God; the warning being annexed, "Lest I come and smite the land (earth) with a curse." John the Baptist was a burning and shining light, the vivid likeness of the Tishbite; but his ministry did not accomplish the end specified. The heart of the nation was not turned; and instead of oneness, there was division and a sword (Luke 12:51-52); son against father, and father against son. They did not repent, and so they were smitten; and not only they, but their land; so that it remains a desolation and a curse until this day. But when the literal Elijah comes, at Messiah's Second Advent, then shall be the blessing and not the curse. His mission shall be effectual. The heart of the nation shall be turned;

God will give them "ONE heart" (Eze. 11:19); "the people shall be all righteous"; people and land shall alike be blessed of the Lord; division and discord shall cease; unity and love shall overflow. Then shall be the reign of peace, under the scepter of the Prince of peace. As the Old Testament ends with that awful word, "curse," the New Testament begins and ends with blessing: "Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the pure in heart"; and "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (Rev. 22:21).

(1.) The great warning (v. 1). There is a day coming that shall decide everything. All that God hates shall be utterly swept away. Sinner, tremble and turn.

(2.) The consolation of the faithful (v. 2). There is a remnant; and the mark of this is that "they fear God's name." What stress God lays on this "fear." What honor he puts on those in whom it is found.

(3.) The mighty victory (v. 3). These "fearers" are "warriors" too. They fight, and overcome, and triumph. The reward of victory is theirs; the palm and crown.

(4.) The unchangeable standard of holiness (v. 4). God's law is perfect. It stands forever. In the last ages, as well as the first, it is the great rule. It tells what God loves and what he hates.

(5.) The world's last sermon. It comes from esteemed lips; from one who has been near three thousand years in heaven. Elijah comes to give God's great message to Israel. The nation hears. The blessing

comes.

To all this we are looking forward in these last days. When the great day may come, we do not know. It may be near. Let us look for its signs. Let us listen for its sounds of warning. The message has gone forth. WATCH. In such an hour as you think not, the son of man cometh! "Little children, it is the last time" (1 John 2:18).

The world is not ready for its Judge. In the day when He comes it will be dumb. "What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?" asks the prophet (Jer. 13:21). Yes; the world is unready. But this will not hinder his coming. "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." As a thief he shall come. As the lightning he shall come. As a snare he shall come. As a judge he shall come. As an avenger he shall come. As the wielder of the iron rod he shall come. As King of kings and Lord of lords he shall come.

O Sons of men, take warning. When you are saying peace and safety, sudden destruction will come. When you are enjoying your lusts and pleasures, in the theater, or the concert, or the, or the gaming-table, he, the Judge of quick and dead, shall come. Oh, ere he thus comes to you, come ye to him! Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way.

Make haste, for judgment lingers not, damnation slumbers not. The time is short. But the gate is open; and he who has opened it bids you enter. He pities you, he yearns over you, in the deep sincerity of divine compassion. "He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." While yet then he lingers in his love, oh haste to be saved. He may soon be here. The trumpet of the Judge may soon sound. The day which shall burn as an oven may soon begin.