

In  
High Esteem  
of a  
Guide and Instructor

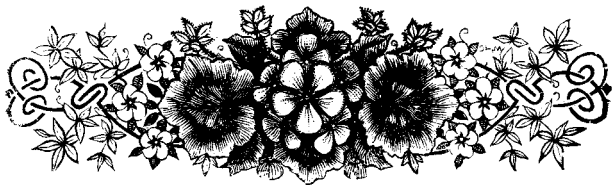
NOW WITH CHRIST  
THESE GOSPEL STUDIES  
ARE AGAIN SENT FORTH  
FOR HIM TO  
GRACIOUSLY USE AND BLESS.

## Prelatory Note.



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*January, 1903.*



# GOSPEL STUDIES,

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## I.

### SHOWING GRACE.

**T**HE Gospel, or glad tidings, of the grace of God, is the designation (Acts xx. 24) of the message to be proclaimed in these days. The Lord in His life preached, but preached the glad tidings of the kingdom of God (Luke viii. 1), whilst teaching about and offering everlasting life to any one in Israel who would receive it. On the day He rose, however, it was evident a new era had begun to dawn on this world. Gospel times were at hand; for He commissioned His disciples first on that day to preach the glad tidings of the grace of God unto all nations, beginning at or from Jerusalem (Luke xxiv. 46, 47).

Now this message, a new one for men to hear, was not the result of any afterthought

on the part of God. It had always been His purpose that such should be proclaimed, though until after the death and resurrection of His Son the fitting time for it had not arrived. The resurrection an accomplished fact, the time long looked forward to by our God had drawn near, and the Lord, who had suffered unto death, the death of the cross, bearing thereon divine judgment for sinners, had the joy, we may well believe it, of charging His disciples with the service of proclaiming to any one, and to every one, tidings hitherto unheard.

If we desire, then, to acquaint ourselves with that message, and to learn how it was preached, we must necessarily consult the pages of the New Testament. The result of that, probably, will be that many a passage or history in the Old Testament will have an interest for us, as illustrating something connected with the Gospel, which, if read as a chapter in history merely, it would not possess. Let us turn to 2 Sam. ix. for an illustration of this.

David had reached the zenith of his power and glory. He had brought the ark of God into Jerusalem. He had subdued, too, the nations round about him, and had given a substantial proof of it by dedicating to the Lord the silver and gold taken from those whom he had conquered, viz., Syria, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, Amalek, Edom, and Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah; whilst Hiram of Tyre, and Toi, king of Hamath,

courted his alliance, and the latter gave him gifts. Humanly speaking, there was nothing lacking to David. From Edom to the Euphrates he ruled supreme ; none could withstand him.

It was at this juncture that he asked the question given us in the first verse of the chapter in Samuel already referred to : " Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake ? " Who suggested that to David ? No one certainly on earth. Evidently, the question implied it ; he had held intercourse with no one who could answer it ; nor, it is clear, had any petition reached the foot of his throne to entreat his favour towards any of the house of Saul for Jonathan's sake. David asked the question, and, as far as his courtiers were concerned, he asked in vain. None of them could tell him ; none of them, it is clear, had interested themselves in such a matter. Saul had been the king's persistent enemy. All knew that. His grandson—for it turned out he had one, an heir male—was living across the Jordan in obscurity. But why should any one about the court interest himself in such a person ?

This question, then, humanly speaking, had its origin in David's heart ; for though at the height of his glory, he had not forgotten, nor would he forget, the link that had subsisted between Jonathan and himself. Time did not efface the remembrance of it. Years, indeed, had rolled by since Jonathan's death ; for the

child, five years old on that eventful day (2 Sam. iv. 4), had grown up to manhood, and was himself a father (2 Sam. ix. 12); but Jonathan yet lived in the king's heart: and that question, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" told to all at court that, though Jonathan's deeds might, perhaps, no longer be talked about, he was remembered with affection by the conqueror of nations who was reigning at Jerusalem.

Had that question of David's met with an answer in the negative, the bowels of his heart must have been shut up; he so desirous to act in grace, but finding no one who was a fitting subject for it. Who should answer the question as David desired it to be answered? A man was found, Ziba, a servant of the house of Saul, who might tell the king what he wanted. Evidently it was no passing whim. It was not a momentary impulse that had swayed him. He was in earnest. He was desirous to show kindness, if the suited object could be discovered. Ziba was therefore called, and the question was put to him by the king. In such a business David would delegate a commission to no one. He would himself ask the question, and receive the answer direct from Ziba's mouth.

A moment of interest that must have been, as Ziba began to answer, "Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame upon his feet." "Jonathan hath yet a son." A suited subject for the king's favour could be found. There was

one, but only one. The person sought after must be one of Saul's house, and of Jonathan's race. No one who did not answer to that description could share in the favour contemplated by the king; for the individual must answer to the requirements set forth by the one on the throne.

Can we read such a history, and observe the salient features of it, without being reminded of God, and the grace in which men may share? The desire David expressed had its origin, as we have said, humanly speaking, in David's heart. Many a person there might have been that day in want among the people; but to none except to those of Saul's house, and of Jonathan's race, was the king's favour waiting to be shown. Poverty, sorrow, suffering some might perhaps have pleaded; but all that would not in itself have qualified the subjects of it to a share in David's special favour. Only to those of a certain race was the offer of grace to be extended. In this instance only one was found qualified to be a recipient of it.

As it was with David, so with God, but with God in an absolute way; the desire to act in grace springs wholly from His heart, and had its origin, we learn, in His heart before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4). As with Jonathan's son, so with us, the favour to be shown is reserved for a certain race, one especial family, for the offspring of Adam are not the only family existing in the universe (Eph. iii. 15). To none, however, but to those o.

his race has God offered to show grace. We may trace out the comparison ; we must also mark the difference. One person only was found a fitting object for the king's favour. Thank God, thousands and tens of thousands have been found fitting objects of divine favour. No one outside of Jonathan's direct line was sought after by David. To all those of Adam's race God offers the fullest grace. "I will give unto him that is athirst," are the words of Him that sitteth upon the throne, "of the fountain of the water of life freely" (Rev. xxi. 6).

"Jonathan hath yet a son." What words for David's ear and David's heart. His desire could be satisfied in acting in grace towards that son, who was yet in total ignorance of the king's thought or of the king's wish. Blessed indeed was the one that day who answered to the class that David had described. For him there was in store what no one probably on earth, beside David, had ever supposed.

"Jonathan hath yet a son." Just one. Thank God, as we have said, it is not one only of the children of men who answers to the description of those who can be subjects of divine and saving grace. But who, and what are such? The lost and dead (Luke xv. 24). Such is the description given us by Him who came to seek and to save the lost (Luke xix. 10.) How many answer to this? All of Adam's race. None of his offspring are found morally by nature in any other class. To such



is participation in divine favour offered ; on such, lost and dead, can God freely bestow it.

David was in earnest when Ziba's announcement had been made, "Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet." Now what use could such an one be to the king ? He could not fight his battles ; he could not wait on him ; he could not minister to him. "Lame on his feet !" This told of Mephibosheth's incapacity and helplessness. Certainly he had done nothing to merit the king's favour, for till that moment David did not know of his existence in life. He could perform no act of valour to merit it, for he was lame, and how lame his subsequent history brings out : for when David fled from Absalom, Mephibosheth had desired to follow in his train, but could not, for Ziba had surreptitiously carried off the ass on which he was accustomed to ride, so he could not leave the city. Of what use, then, could he be to David ? Better leave him, some might have said, in obscurity. Of what use could he possibly be ? Of the greatest. He was just the fitting one for David at that moment. True, he could do nothing to earn the king's favour. His connection it was with Jonathan that marked him out as one suited for it, and his lameness made him only the more fit for it. He could be of great service, for he could be proof to all Israel of the grace in the king's heart.

How desirous was David to show kindness for Jonathan's sake ; yet not more willing, not more desirous to bestow the favour he

wished than God is to act in grace toward us; for He sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world. He gave His only-begotten Son. He sent Him to die on the cross. Willingly the Son came. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God," are the words which tell us of it (Ps. xl. 8). For lost ones, for dead ones He came. What had they done to deserve such love? Nothing. *Lost* tells of the activity of their will, like the sheep which wandered. *Dead* speaks of the soul's condition. Such could not serve God. What can a dead person do? What good works can a dead soul produce? Of what use can such be to God? Let us hear the divine answer to that question: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that *in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*" (Eph. ii. 4-7). Of such use can those once dead, when recipients of life and salvation by grace, be to God. David, till Ziba told him, knew nothing of Mephibosheth. God knows, and Christ knows who those are who were chosen in Him before the "foundation of the world," given to Him of His Father, and all of them shall come to Him.

Ziba's answer given, there was no holding back on David's part because Mephibosheth was lame. Nothing that could have been

told David of his condition would have made him swerve from his purpose. Mephibosheth was Jonathan's son; that was enough to secure for him the outflow of royal favour. So the king sent and fetched him from the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lodebar. Nothing that God saw in us, or knew about us, has made Him change towards us. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. iv. 4). "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." And now that the world has rejected His Son, God has raised up a ministry of reconciliation, and given to the ministers of it the word of reconciliation to announce it to guilty creatures (2 Cor. v. 18-21).

Mephibosheth is now brought into the king's presence, and beheld for the first time the one whom Saul, his grandfather, had relentlessly and unrighteously persecuted. Mephibosheth with David! What a meeting! Mephibosheth fell at the king's feet. Fitting position. Who will break the silence? One word does it: "Mephibosheth," said David addressing him by name. Surely that must have encouraged him. "Fear not." That must have assured him, putting him at his ease before him, without the room for one doubt, as the king proceeded to announce the ground on which he would deal kindly with him for Jonathan, his father's sake. He might think of his lameness, might call himself a dead dog, but no sense of his incapacity to serve the king actively

was to be any barrier in his thoughts to the outflow of the royal favour ; yet the consciousness of his condition he was not to overlook. Would it not deepen in his heart a sense of the greatness of David's grace ? Jonathan, thy father's sake ; that was the ground, and unchanging ground, for Jonathan was dead. Had he been still alive, he might perchance by some act have forfeited the king's favour ; being dead that was impossible. Hence kindness to Mephibosheth on David's part was assured to him, if only he would receive it. How like God's ways with us, showing kindness to those who could not claim it, just like Mephibosheth ; but worse, who deserved unsparing judgment, which Mephibosheth did not deserve at the hand of David. The guilty, the lost, God would set perfectly at home in His presence, telling them of the death of His Son, and of the abiding efficacy of His blood shed once for all on the cross. Now, since that is the ground on which God can act in grace, that ground can never alter. As Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth was a fitting subject for David's favour ; and "for Jonathan, thy father's sake," assured him of the unchanging ground on which he stood that day. The guilty, the dead, such are suited subjects for divine favour ; and the death of Christ once for all on the cross is the unchanging ground on which we stand, justified by His blood.

How many readers of this paper share in this grace ? Lost and dead : to such it can be shown, and none in that class can say they

are excluded. Whosoever believeth on Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Mephibosheth was before the king, in whose presence he had never been before. Henceforth he would always stand before him. Thus privileged by the king, who could deny him this favour? David had granted it. Who could annul it? But more: he had sworn to Jonathan that he would not cut off his kindness to his seed. That oath was fulfilled; and far more than what he had sworn did he do. Mephibosheth must have an inheritance, and a place at David's table always.

What had been his position? Dependent perhaps in measure on Machir's kindness. Now how wealthy he had become. "I will restore thee all the land of Saul, thy father, and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." Who of men, but David, had thought of this? Nothing less would suit his heart. The inheritance, the favour, was not measured by Mephibosheth's deserts, nor by his desires, but solely by those of the king himself. Unworthy, of course, he was "to eat bread at the king's table as one of the king's sons." This was favour unmerited, unsought, and unthought of by the recipient of it. Did he cavil about it? No, he accepted it. David could do much; but our God has done more. All the land of Saul, thy father, was the measure of Mephibosheth's inheritance; heaven and earth is that of ours. As one of the king's son's he could be; but that little word *as* told its tale of David's grace

and David's powerlessness. Far, far beyond man's thoughts are God's. We are His children, His sons and daughters; and "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). How interesting is such a history when read in the light of the Gospel.





## II.

### Repentance.

“**T**HAT repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among (or to) all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke xxiv. 47). These words fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus, when He met His disciples in the upper room at Jerusalem on the day He rose from the dead.

To preach repentance was nothing new. John the Baptist had preached it (Matt. iii. 2), and the Lord likewise (Mark i. 15). Where failure has come in on man’s part as concerning his duty to God, repentance is a needed exercise ere God can allow the guilty one to enjoy His favour and goodness. Hence to all the nations was repentance to be preached, beginning at Jerusalem.

In the Acts we see this commission begun to be carried out. Peter in the upper room proclaimed the need of it to the multitude

pricked in their heart (Acts ii. 38). Paul on Mars Hill, within sight of heathen altars and temples, insisted on it (xvii. 30). Nor were these the only occasions on which that subject was taken up. In the Temple courts, Peter's voice was heard insisting on it (iii. 19). Before the Sanhedrim the Apostles proclaimed it, as they told of Him whom God hath exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (v. 31). In Samaria, Peter urged the importance of this on Simon Magus (viii. 22). At Ephesus, both publicly and privately, Paul had pressed it (xx. 21). Wherever he went, first unto them at Damascus, next at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, the great Apostle showed that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (xxvi. 20). The failure of each and all was thus declared, and the path which could lead into blessing was at the same time pointed out.

Jews and Gentiles alike had failed. All equally God's creatures, all His responsible creatures, though not all responsible in the same measure, repentance was needed for every one. Who commanded it to be preached? God. And why? He has told us by the mouth of His servant Paul: "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world (or, habitable earth) in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance



unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts xvii. 31). It was a fitting moment, and a fitting place for the Apostle Paul to proclaim it. A fitting moment, for he and his hearers were living on earth between the resurrection and the return of the crucified, but now exalted Saviour, to judge and to reign. It was a fitting place, because standing in the midst of so many temples and altars, he thereby set forth the impossibility of "man being saved by the law, or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature." Philosophers might jeer, and Epicurians might deride, the Stoics might maintain an impassive appearance, but none could with safety afford to neglect the important and solemn announcement then made.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely an historic event, and a miraculous event which happened in Judea, but it concerns the whole habitable earth. Wherever the children of men dwell, the fact of the Lord's resurrection concerns them. It is a witness to all of a day of judgment, and an announcement to all that the Lord who was crucified is to be their Judge (2 Cor. v. 10). Repentance, therefore, had need to be pressed, if any were to be saved. God desires to save, and hence has sent forth this message. Accordingly, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul constantly and earnestly pressed; pointing out too, the need of doing works meet for (or, worthy of)

repentance (Acts xxvi. 20), the goodness of God leading men to repentance (Rom. ii. 4).

But what is repentance? How many a one has been perplexed about this, through lack of simplicity, and, it may be, from defective teaching. Now, repentance is a judging of one's self and of one's ways, and a turning from them. A change of mind? Yes. About whom or what? About God? No; about myself and my ways. But that is not all. The Scripture insists on works worthy of repentance. Fruit worthy of it is to be produced. An example of it Jeremiah prophetically describes, in language which in a future day Ephraim will make use of: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn Thou me, and I shall be turned: for Thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." And what is the answer on God's part? "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah xxxi. 18-20).

Some may ask, How can this be brought about? It is an important question. And when the conscience is aroused, fearing the

coming judgment, it is a question which cannot be lightly dismissed. How simple is the answer. He who was crucified is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins (Acts v. 31). The coming and unerring Judge is the One who gives repentance to those needing it, who will receive it. He *gives* it. Efforts, toil, self-mortification, all are in vain. He *gives* it, as we learn; for it is wrought in the soul by the word of God acting on the conscience by the power of the Spirit. So it is characterised as repentance towards God, and repentance unto life (Acts xx. 21; xi. 18); fruit of godly sorrow, which works repentance unto salvation not to be repented of (2 Cor. vii. 10). There is then to be considered the instrumentality which can work it in us, and the dealing with individuals to effect it. To illustrations of both, let us now turn.

And first as to the instrumentality. That is the word of God. "The men of Nineveh," the Searcher of hearts and future Judge of men declared, "repented at the preaching of Jonas" (Matt. xii. 41). Then a deep acquaintance with revelation is no needful preliminary qualification. The Ninevites had no previous revelation from God. Education, scholarship, leisure, these are not indispensable requisites, as that history markedly testifies. Of course there were men of education and of leisure in that large city, but there were many also who had to labour for their bread. Was it only the learned who bowed to the prophet's message? All classes gave heed to it, no one,

perhaps, being more surprised at the result than the messenger himself.

Told to go to Nineveh, the metropolis of a great Asiatic power, the prophet attempted to evade the discharge of such a service, but in vain. God's purposes of goodness to that city and its inhabitants were to be carried out; and Jonah, the son of Amittai, of Gath-hepher, of the tribe of Zebulun, was the instrument selected for this purpose. And his wilful disobedience, and his miraculous preservation in the depths of the sea by being in the fish's belly, only the better fitted him to assure the Ninevites that God did judge evil, and yet could act in grace towards those who had wilfully disobeyed Him. Cast out then by the fish on dry land, he went to Nineveh a stranger, unknown, probably, to any one within its walls, and so without a friend in it, or a companion by his side. And he went with a message not calculated, humanly speaking, to assure him of a favourable reception, nor one which probably had ever been heard there before: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah iii. 4).

Who was to preach that? A man of the kingdom of Israel, which under Jehu had paid tribute to Shalmeneser II., a former king of Assyria. This fact, unnoticed in Scripture, but recorded on the black obelisk now in this country, was doubtless known to the prophet, and well known to the inhabitants of Nineveh. Who, then, would be likely to listen to such a preacher, one of a country the Ninevites

would despise? Who would favourably receive such a messenger, announcing what to unconverted man is most unwelcome—the near approach of a crushing judgment? How, too, should such an one know the near or distant future? they might ask. Had they not wise men to forecast the future? What could that stranger know, which they did not? Such thoughts as to the probable reception he would meet with might naturally have passed through his mind. But what was the result?

No messenger with such an ordinarily unwelcome message had ever met with the reception that Jonah did. He “began to enter into the city a day’s journey; and he cried and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah iii. 4). In that one day his work was done. The word told on the people, and hearts were bowed. What caused this remarkable result; for remarkable it was, standing out as it does without a parallel, or anything approaching to it, in the history of Christian missions? Was it some peculiar personal influence exercised by the preacher? We know how personal influence can sway those brought under it. But the prophet had only traversed about one third of the city. Multitudes in it could not as yet have seen him, much less have heard him. Was it anything especially attractive in his intonation? It is unlikely that a native of Northern Palestine would have charmed by his voice or pronunciation the

rulers and courtly subjects of the renowned and long-standing capital of the Assyrian empire. Was it the persuasiveness of his message? He only announced destruction, without one ray of hope to gild the edge of the dark thunder-cloud, and that destruction as near at hand. Was the king struck with the appearance or manner of the prophet? It would seem the king had never seen him, when he issued his decree for a general fast with external tokens of humiliation; for we read, "Word came unto the King of Nineveh." He heard of the prophet, but had not seen him.

Yet all hearts were bowed, as bullrushes before the wind. What had done it? The prophet was alone when he began to preach. Listeners heard, and could not keep silence. The word was passed on. People could not be still; that was evident. For the king heard through some intermediate agency, and himself swelled the number of workers in the cause, as "he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn

and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" (iii. 6-9).

Now, what had wrought this marvellous result? Human influence certainly had not. Humanly speaking, everything was against the success of the message. Jonah preached the preaching which God had bidden him. God then blessed it, and pressed home on consciences His own word. It was the simple word of God which had acted in this marvellous and widespread way. What earnestness was displayed. He who reads all hearts has Himself told us, they repented at the preaching of Jonah. What reality was manifested. The beasts had not sinned; the Ninevites had. Ignorance of the true God, of course, was universal in the city. They possessed no written revelation from the God of heaven, and any traditionary record had probably died out. To the first verbal revelation, however, that they received they gave attention. No excuses were made, no palliation of the past attempted; but clothed in sack-cloth, both man and beast, and fasting all alike, that vast city was prostrate, as it were, before the footstool of the Almighty, brought low by the preaching of His word. And what were the tidings announced? Grace? No; judgment—nothing but judgment.

Never before, and never since, has such a spectacle been witnessed—a whole city bowed down by the word of God, and all its inhabitants casting themselves on the sovereign mercy of the Creator. Noah preached right-

eousness, but, as far as we know, preached it in vain. Three thousand were pricked in heart at Pentecost, but Jerusalem was not humbled. At Nineveh how different. As we have said, with every circumstance humanly speaking adverse to success, the preacher a stranger, and quite alone, a native of Northern Palestine, and of that kingdom which under Jehu had paid tribute to Assyria, the message, too, anything but attractive, yet all were bowed in humiliation and fasting before God. A message from the God of heaven whom they did not serve, and whom they had not known, brought all within the vast enclosure of Nineveh on their knees in sackcloth and in earnest supplication.

What more marked illustration of the simple power of the Word could be conceived? Jonah preached, consciences were reached, all hearkened. All signs of merriment vanished; lightness and frivolity fled away; all were in earnest, for they believed the message. Who after reading this will put a limit to the power of the Word? If the instrument is looked at, man might say it is hopeless work. But who should not confide in the simple delivery of the message? God spoke by His servant, one who had sadly failed, and the city of 700,000 fell prostrate before His footstool. God works still, and by His word which works repentance. It may be a word of grace, or, as it was in this case, a word of judgment which is used. In any case it is God's word, His message which



does the work. What confidence this should give. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. iv. 6).

The goodness of God leadeth to repentance. Illustrated in this history that surely was. God, who is love, is also light. He bears for a time, but not for ever, with the ungodly. Judgment must come, if repentance is not wrought in the soul. His period of forbearance with Nineveh was then well-nigh exhausted. Forty days more, and judgment must have overtaken them. Who warned them of it? God, by His servant; God, whom they knew not. Was their ignorance of Him a sufficient plea for arrest of judgment? No; they were His creatures, and responsible creatures. Forty days, and then—what? Unsparing judgment. On the brink of a precipice they stood, but wholly ignorant of it, till Jonah preached, sent by the God of heaven to warn them, and to bring them to repentance. For judgment is His strange work. On the brink of a precipice men still unsaved now stand. Have they forty days respite assured to them? Nay; not forty hours, not forty minutes, not forty seconds can they call their own. The judgment-day is fixed; the Judge is appointed; and how soon any one still unsaved may be beyond the reach of grace no one can say. But as with the Ninevites, so with men now; He who knows the span of life on earth and the limit of forbearance He has allotted to each one, is

the One who has sent out a message commanding all men everywhere to repent (Acts xvii. 31).

The Ninevites believed God (Jonah iii. 5). The work was real. The message effected the divine purpose; it put the conscience of those ignorant heathen in connection with God. He was now everything to them; their idols were nothing. The whole question was—Could, would God be merciful? An answer in the affirmative—a definite, unhesitating reply—could alone satisfy them. They prayed, surely, as they had never prayed before. They prayed to One they had not known, or worshipped before. They agreed to fast, and to clothe themselves in sackcloth. For how long? For a day? No specified time was expressed in the decree. We can understand that. They turned from their evil ways, and were prepared to fast and to wear sackcloth, till assurance was vouchsafed them that the threatened doom was averted. What earnestness is manifested when the conscience has been reached by the word of God. God saw them; God heard them. “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not” (iii. 10).

To God they cried: “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” (iii. 9). The Holy One, blessed be His name, did not let them sink into despair. To Him they

turned; to no intermedium did they betake themselves. With God they had to do. They learnt that, for He had spoken to them by His servant Jonah. To Him they cried; nor did they cry in vain. What a waking up for them! what opening of eyes! God, whom they had not served, held them responsible for their ways, and threatened to punish them for their wickedness. What mercy that He warned them, who did not deserve it, forty days before the divine forbearance would be exhausted. He desired to save; He does that still. "Who can tell," etc., they cried. For no mercy had been offered them. Thank God, no one need say that now. We *can* tell, for God Himself has assured us, that no one who comes to His Son shall in any wise be cast out.

We have spoken of the instrumentality God uses—His word. But there are occasions, when some special sin, or course of sin, has to be pressed on the conscience ere relief from fear of judgment can be obtained. An instance of this is furnished in the history of Joseph with his brethren, when they went down to Egypt to buy corn (Gen. xlii.—xlv). Joseph, when he saw them, knew them, but they did not know him. Purposes of grace he had towards them, as his conduct throughout proved. No bitterness, no vindictiveness was found in him whom they had cruelly treated. He would have them at ease before him, and at home with him; but repentance must first be wrought in them. How did he bring this

about? They must judge themselves for the past.

In pursuance of this, he first made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly to them (Gen. xlii. 7). They had been the original cause of his imprisonment. They must be imprisoned (17). Then the remembrance of their brother came home with power. Joseph did not speak of it; no one in Egypt knew of it; but a monitor there was within their breasts, which, though it may have been dormant for a time, could not be silent for ever. It now awoke, and his very look of anguish was vividly recalled to each one: "We saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear." Memory does not die, though it may for a time slumber. When the dead are judged according to their works, will they not remember them? Joseph's brethren now recall the scene, and own they were verily guilty; and rightly, therefore, were they now in trouble.

But they had sold Joseph into slavery, and Judah had been the leader in that. Slavery must they face as their doom, and Judah especially, ere grace on Joseph's part could be known by them. This we see in xliv. Accused of stealing the cup, but guiltless of it, they declare their willingness that the offender should die, and the rest should be slaves in Egypt to him whose hospitality had been so abused. Horror-stricken they become when the cup, after a search was made, was found in Benjamin's sack. All turned back

to Egypt, and now Judah, to save Benjamin, volunteers to be the slave in his place. He faces the very doom to which he had consigned Joseph. When this was reached, relief came. The doom was averted; for Joseph was yet alive, and they stood owned as his brethren in his presence. Wisely had he dealt with them. All had to remember and judge themselves for the past; and Judah, the greatest offender, saw nothing before him but life-long slavery, or the breaking of his aged father's heart. To that he was brought, an exercise surely never forgotten. That done, relief appeared. Joseph revealed himself to them, and the black cloud of life-long slavery, a fitting punishment, rolled away, and they all basked ever after in the sunshine of Joseph's undeserved but continuous favour. The goodness of Joseph they then learnt. The goodness of God, which leads to repentance, all God's saints have known.



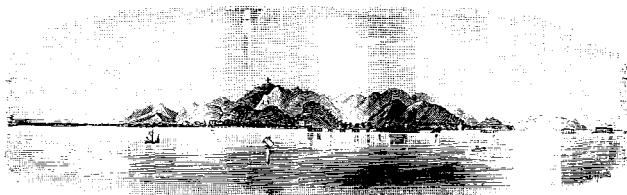
“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

●

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead.”

Acts xi. 17, 18; xiii. 29-31.



### III.

## Forgiveness.



**F**ORGIVENESS of sins is one of the blessings which Israel will enjoy under the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 34). Forgiveness of sins we can share in now, because the blood on which the new covenant will be based has been already shed.

Under the law such a favour was unknown, till the Lord Himself came and announced it. Till then God showed Himself to be gracious in according forgiveness for an act of sin, whatever man might have thought of it (Lev. iv., v.), if the appointed sacrifice was brought to His altar, and there dealt with aright. For, apart from sacrifice, none could count on forgiveness being assured to them. Plenary for-

givenness of sins with which we are familiar was not in those days dispensed. The revelation made to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah (xxx. 31-34; Heb. viii. 12; x. 17) did, however, predict it; and the voice of John the Baptist, calling the people to the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, announced the near approach of that favour. Yet neither Jeremiah nor John were commissioned to preach it. It was a favour still to be waited for, a favour, too, surely desired, as the multitude, stirred up by the Baptist's heart-searching preaching, were baptised of him in Jordan confessing their sins.

John preached, and crowds were attracted, and submitted themselves to that rite, the special ordinance of God in their day, which was at once the confession of their need, and the expression of their hope that God would meet it. They were cast upon Him. The law, they evidently felt and knew, could not by the provisions of the Mosaic ritual supply what was wanted; so God's altar was not the centre to which all now directed their steps, nor were the priests then overburdened with a multitude of sin-offerings to be duly dealt with on behalf of sin-burdened consciences. All classes turned elsewhere, even to the Jordan, where was a priest of Aaron's house proclaiming fearlessly and effectively the need of repentance, and of baptism by him if any desired to enjoy forgiveness of their sins. It was a stirring time, and a new chapter in the history of God's dealings with



His people. Unchanged in His nature, maintaining, at its full height the standard of holiness, God was preparing His people for a participation in the fulness of His grace. The Baptist pointed his hearers to the near advent of Jehovah Himself, coming to a people who confessedly had sinned, yet not to condemn, but to bless them (Acts iii. 26). His was a ministry raised up by God to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.

At length the Lord appeared, and did what John could not. He announced forgiveness of sins (Mark ii. 5; Luke vii. 48), but only, as far as we know, to a few individuals during the course of his ministry amongst men. To all baptised of John He did not proclaim it. We know not that He did so to any of them. We do know that to the woman in the Pharisee's house He declared it, and that in His public ministry He kept alive the hope of it. But that woman He assured of it, and that apart from any offering to be taken by her to God's altar to procure it. No sacrifice which she could have taken to Jerusalem could by any possibility have met her need. Presumptuous sin was not provided for by the law; hence the favour that was bestowed on her is of such interest to all of us. It was the earnest of the gospel of the grace of God, which can now be freely and fully proclaimed to every one upon earth. As yet, however, but a few individuals could know it, and they heard it from the Lord's own mouth. The joy was His, and rightly so, of first telling a

wretched, guilty creature of the forgiveness of sins, really based on God's acceptance of the true Sacrifice, the Lamb of His own providing—His well-beloved Son. New, indeed, to those acquainted with the letter of Old Testament revelation was such an announcement. The reasonings of their hearts laid bare to us attest this (Mark ii. 6, 7; Luke vii. 49).

His death drew near; His last night before His cross had come. Alone with the twelve in the upper room, at the institution of His supper, the Lord supplemented the revelation made through Jeremiah, as He announced on the shedding of whose blood the new covenant would rest (Matt. xxvi. 28). Fitting it was that He should declare this,—a joy surely to His heart, who was about to suffer agony and death on the cross, to maintain untarnished the holiness of God, and to allow divine grace to flow out in righteousness to the vilest and to the lost. Three days more, and His disciples would be commissioned by Him to preach far and wide to any one and to every one who would receive it, forgiveness of sins in His name (Luke xxiv. 47), beginning at Jerusalem.

Six weeks later, the gospel of the grace of God began to be sounded forth, a gospel suited for every race, every rank, and every age between Pentecost and the rapture. "Beginning at Jerusalem." Such was the Lord's announcement, when raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. Crucified in weakness He had been, now quickened in the Spirit, and about to ascend to His Father, to sit on

Jehovah's right hand, until His enemies be made His footstool, He desired that in the very city of His rejection, the place of His most public humiliation, the good news of the forgiveness of sins through His blood should first be proclaimed. Then far and wide, on sea and on land, amongst civilised races and amongst barbarians, north, south, east, and west, wherever the children of men dwell, the divine proclamation of the plenary forgiveness of their sins could be carried by those who rejoiced in it on their own behalf. So Peter could preach it at Cesarea to the household and friends of the centurion, Cornelius; and Paul was authorised to proclaim it to a company to whom personally he was a stranger, gathered in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. From place to place, and from nation to nation, this gospel spread. The converts at Ephesus, a great centre of idolatry, received it (Eph. i. 7); the saints at Colosse rejoiced in it (Col. i. 14); all classes of Christians to whom John wrote were sure about it (1 John ii. 12). In apostolic times there was no doubt about it. No one could, no one did in those days share in full Christian blessing without it. So it is still; for the knowledge of it received into the heart by faith is in an ordinary way the necessary condition for the receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts ii. 38, x. 43-45; Eph. i. 13), and its attendant train of blessings.

Forgiveness of sins was preached, forgiveness through the blood of Christ. It was a

proclamation on the part of God, but based on a Sacrifice which He had accepted. Accordingly, the sacred writers of the New Testament present it in this twofold way. They declared themselves to be the bearers of this proclamation, which they were authorised to set forth (Acts xiii. 38); and they pointed to God's acceptance of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ in attestation of the truth of it (Heb. x. 11, 12).

In Old Testament times it was different. There were sins for which a sin-offering could be brought. There were those for which no sacrifice under the law was provided, and the penalty for which was death (Num. xv. 30, 31). God might, of course, act in mercy in such cases, and forgive. At times He did. Under such circumstances no sin-offering could be offered, but the sinner could be assured of forgiveness on the simple authority of God's word.

To an instance of this, furnished us in 2 Sam. xii., let us now turn. David had sinned in the matter of Uriah's wife, and was guilty before God of adultery and murder. It was the great blot on his life (1 Kings xv. 5), and God could not pass it over. It must all come out to the light. So Nathan visited the king. How God's righteousness and God's mercy shine out. Righteousness necessitated the dealing with David on account of it; mercy moved God to send the prophet to the king respecting it. "The Lord sent Nathan unto David." This was not the first time

Nathan had been commissioned to visit David (2 Sam. vii.), nor was it the last, as we shall see. But the service on which the prophet was now sent called, humanly speaking, for great tact. It was by no means an enviable one. David had evinced no sign of repentance. No expression of contrition, it is clear, had passed his lips. Months had elapsed, yet confession to God had not been made. One learns how a saint can fall, and how dull the conscience can become. Shall we point the finger at David? Could any do it, who had learnt about themselves? Should we do it with the apostolic admonition in remembrance, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12)? What are we? What should we do if we rushed into temptation? Let it be remarked too, ere we pass on, that it was God sent to David; it was not David seeking after God.

The prophet approached the king. The one who had the mind of God visited him, in whose hand God had placed the sword of judgment. Now face to face, the prophet of God confronting the minister of God (Rom. xiii. 4), with marvellous tact he leads on the king to pass judgment really on himself, unconscious, it would seem, as he did so, of the heinousness of his guilt. David's anger was kindled against the supposed perpetrator of such cruel injustice. He could be indignant at the conduct of another, oblivious of his own; but he must judge himself, ere grace could be accorded him. The sentence went

forth from David, only for him to learn that the judge was the criminal. He was the guilty man; Uriah's wife was the one little ewe lamb; and now the secret history of Uriah's death stood out exposed to all the world. "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die," said David. "Thou art the man," was Nathan's quick rejoinder. Uriah fell in battle; that all Israel knew; but the reason for it, a secret probably between Joab and David till then, now comes out. "Thou hast smitten Urijah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon" (ver. 9). The history of this iniquity stood disclosed. God had seen it; God remembered it; God would have David convicted of it. Convicted? Yes. Not to drive him to despair, but to lead him to repentance.

No room was allowed for equivocation or excuse. Thou hast smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword. But David had struck no blow; Uriah died as a soldier by the hand of the enemy. Had David glossed over his sins by such an excuse? If he had, he could do it no longer. "Thou hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon" were words the truth of which he could not deny. All distinction between legal guilt and moral guilt was in this case demolished. No death warrant had been signed by David; the Ammonites who smote Uriah were perfectly ignorant of David's plot against the life of his

faithful servant ; yet in God's eyes it was as much David's act as if he had signed the death warrant for Uriah's public execution, or had put forth his own hand and had struck him dead. "Thou hast smitten" ! "thou hast slain" ! The whole transaction was thus laid bare. Quietly and successfully, doubtless, David imagined the affair had been managed. An illustration of the divine word : "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence ; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself : but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Psalm l. 21). David was now undeceived. God had not been in ignorance of his sins ; He had not been indifferent. Surely there are some who, since David's time, have acted as perfidiously, though without discovery here. Every crime is not detected on earth. The same eye, however, which witnessed David's actions observes those of others ; and He who remembered David's sins does not forget unrighteous dealing on the part of others. Either in this world or in the next, God, the moral Governor, takes up such controversies, and settles them.

Convicted by the prophet, the king has nothing to say but to acknowledge it. "I have sinned against the Lord" was all he said. To confess was all he could do ; and that was all that was needed for the grace of God in forgiveness to be extended to him. "I have sinned against the Lord." But others have said like this, yet to no purpose ; for

God reads the heart, and He knows the motive of the creature. Pharoah could say, "I have sinned this time" (Ex. ix. 27), when alarmed by the thunder and hail, and desirous of its removal; yet he had not repented, for he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, when the mighty thunderings had ceased. A second time he confessed the same, when the locust had destroyed of vegetation all that the hail had spared; but his only object was to get rid of that plague (Ex. x. 16, 17). Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned"; but betrayed the state of his heart as he added, "Yet honour me now before the elders of my people, and before Israel" (1 Sam. xv. 30). Judas, when he saw that the Lord was condemned, confessed to the chief priests that he had sinned (Matt. xxvii. 4). He had probably reckoned on the Lord delivering Himself, and so hoped to keep the money without being guilty of His death. In none of these cases was there real repentance. In David's case how different. He was not thinking of his character before men, and how that could be saved. He saw and confessed what his guilt was before God. He thus cast himself unreservedly on Him. Now the one who really does that will never repent of it.

"I have sinned against the Lord." A short, real, but solemn confession—an acknowledgment that he was in God's hands, and deserved only death for his offences. "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die," was the prophet's immediate and reassuring



rejoinder. The mercy of God could be extended to one convicted of bloodguiltiness. The law could not meet the case. It demanded David's death on the two counts, viz., of adultery and of murder (Lev. xx. 10; Num. xxxv. 31). No sacrifice could be offered, for he had sinned presumptuously (Ps. li. 16; Num. xv. 30, 31). There was nothing for him but the sovereign mercy of God. Could that be extended to him? God did not leave him one moment in doubt. The prophet had not to go away, and wait till he could assure him of his pardon. Immediately on David's confession, Nathan authoritatively declared it: "The Lord hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die."

On what could the convicted one rest? On the word of God. He had nothing else; and on that word once uttered, and never, that we read of, repeated. Once uttered. Yes. Has God to speak twice? David did not ask that. He heard surely, and rejoiced in the mercy of his God. Like him, the woman in Luke vii. accepted without a question the announcement on the part of the Lord of her forgiveness. The other guests might question it; she did not. Could any one suppose that she walked out of that house otherwise than in peace? So with David. He did not cross-examine the prophet to be sure that there was no mistake. Each surely took what was said, and received it as was meant. Was not that honoring God, the creature bowing readily and in simplicity to the word of the

Creator? How differently have many of us acted. How differently do many still act—so slow to receive the gospel message, so slow to bow to the unfettered proclamation of forgiveness (Acts xiii. 38).

David had nothing but the word by Nathan. We have both the word of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke xxiv. 47) and the revelation of God's acceptance of His Sacrifice on the cross (Heb. x. 11, 12). What more could be wanted by those to whom forgiveness of sins is preached? All has been done which had to be done. Nothing more will be provided to make assurance sure. If God's word cannot be trusted, of what use is the divine revelation? If God's acceptance of the Sacrifice on our behalf is not enough, what will be, what can be?

“The Lord hath put away thy sin,” the prophet declared. God, who alone could do it, had done it. David could not put it away; Nathan could not either. God could, and did. Then it could never be imputed to David. That he understood (Ps. xxxii. 2), and of that the Apostle reminds us (Rom. iv. 8). We know, therefore, that sinners can be assured against any imputation of guilt resting on them for that which they have done. “The Lord hath put away thy sin,” was the word for David. “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” is God's word for us (Heb. x. 17).

Full and everlasting forgiveness, however, does not exempt the subjects of it from divine

dealings with them in government. David had to experience that, even to the end of his life. The child born to him by Uriah's wife (for in that light Bathsheba was still regarded) must die, and the sword should never depart from his house. Of that, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah were examples. Governmental dealing, however, ends with this life. God's favour to us, based on the sacrifice of Christ, lasts for ever. Of this God assures His people.

That interview between Nathan and David terminated. God smote the child, and the child died. Subsequently Solomon was born. Again Nathan, by God's direction, visited the king (2 Sam. xii. 24, 25), not to revive the remembrance of his guilt, but to assure him of the continuance of divine favour. Bathsheba again bore a son, and David called his name Solomon, as previously directed by God (1 Chron. xxii. 9), the earnest, as his name implied, of peace and quietness in Israel during that son's reign. But "the Lord loved him" we read, "and He sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and He called his name Jedidiah," *i.e.*, Beloved of Jehovah. What a touching, tender proof of grace on God's part, and of His desire to reassure His servant of it. Solomon spoke of the character of his reign. Jedidiah assured David that his child was an object of Jehovah's love.

But grace surpassing that are we called to rejoice in, seeing that we who, like David, needed forgiveness, which Solomon at that

time did not, are taught in the Word that as subjects of divine grace we are "beloved of God" (Rom. i. 7 ; 1 Thess. i. 4), and can be described by the Holy Ghost as "beloved in God the Father" (Jude 1).





“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by Him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

—Acts xiii. 38, 39.



“I write unto you, little children,  
because your sins are forgiven you for  
his Name's sake.”

1 John ii. 12.

## IV.—FAITH.



FAITH towards our LORD JESUS CHRIST was part of Paul's testimony to the Jews and to the Greeks (Acts xx. 21). Faith plays an important part in the gospel of God, and has characterised in one way or another God's people in all ages. For from the days of Abel onwards, God's saints, when really faithful, have found the current of things on earth against them, because it is against God. "Without faith," then, "it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." "By it," also, we read, "the elders obtained a good report" (Heb. xi. 6, 2). Hence the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews would encourage his readers by examples of faith in God, culled from the history of saints before the cross—examples drawn from history in its proper *chronological* order, yet illustrating in a *moral* order the conditions under which faith may be called into exercise on the part of a saint whilst on earth.

Beginning with Abel, who was accepted before God on the ground of sacrifice—thus indicating on what alone it is one born in sin can have a place in God's presence—we next learn, in the instances of Enoch and of Noah, of two conditions, in one of which God's saints will be found; either like Enoch, to be

taken out of this scene before divine judgments are poured out on earth, this answering to the Christian's sure hope; or, like Noah, to pass through the judgment, preserved on earth for blessing, this answering to the expectation of God's earthly people in a future day. The prospect of the saint in the future thus delineated, we next learn of faith exhibited by the patriarchs in the days of their pilgrimage (8-22), then of faith in times of conflict (23-31), and lastly, of faith in times of declension and in days of fierce persecution (32-40), all instructive and encouraging for us in the present scene.

Now, "faith," we are told, "is the substantiating of (or, giving substance to) things hoped for, the conviction (or, the proving) of things not seen." What a simple explanation of that which, doubtless, has troubled many a one in the early days of his spiritual career. But what a power there is in that of which those words speak, which nerved and animated saints of old to deeds of valour, to endurance of trials, and to implicit confidence in God. For faith may be manifested by confidence in God, as well as in the quiet resting on His written word. Leaving aside for the present the illustrating the latter, it may not be time thrown away to ponder a little on the former. And for that we would direct the reader to two instances, both of them women—the one concerned for the salvation of her child, the other for the salvation of herself and of her house.



To turn to the first. Joseph was dead, who had been lord over the land of Egypt, and a new king had arisen which knew him not (Ex. i. 8). The royal favour under which Israel settled in Goshen was no longer extended to them. Persecution, with a view to the extinction of their race, was now their lot. Cruel bondage was not enough. The attempt, too, to enlist the two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, in the king's service had signally failed, so an edict had gone forth addressed to all the Egyptians, authorising any one to cast into the river every male child that should be born of the Hebrew race. Now, why was this? Political reasons instigated Pharaoh and his princes (Ex. i. 9, 10). But a deeper reason there was than that; for surely the enemy of souls was in all this, working behind the scenes to ruin for ever, if he could, the whole race of man. For had all the male children of Israel been destroyed, Christ could not have been born of the house and lineage of David. Hence the conflict, ostensibly between Egyptian interests and those of Israel, was really between God and the devil. God desired to bless men; the devil sought to ruin them. At this juncture, Jochebed gave birth to her second son, who was subsequently called Moses. We say at this juncture; that is, after the decree had been issued authorising any Egyptian to drown Hebrew infants; because in the case of Aaron, who was three years older than Moses, we have no hint of his mother's difficulty in preserving him alive.

Now, clearly, at the date of Moses' birth Jochebed might have viewed every Egyptian as a possible foe to her offspring, had not Amram and herself had confidence in God. But looking on the infant and seeing its beauty, they nourished it, hidden in their home for three months, because they did not fear the king's commandment. Unable to keep it there any longer, the faith shown in hiding it at home was to be manifested also in casting it more directly on God; so his mother made an ark of bullrushes, or papyrus, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein, and laid it in the flags by the rivers brink. The materials were ready at hand. Papyrus (or, the paper reed), slime (or, bitumen), or pitch were all that were needed, and the ready hands of the mother made with them the vessel into which she would entrust her child to the care and keeping of her God. It was an *ark*, we read—the word in the original only elsewhere used of the vessel which Noah prepared for the saving of himself and his house. Perhaps the story of the flood, which by that child was subsequently to be written in words taught of the Holy Ghost, was known to her; and her faith rising up to the emergency, she would place the infant in an ark, in confidence that, as Noah and his family had been thus preserved in one, her child might also escape its otherwise, humanly speaking, impending doom.

On the waters of the flood, the cause of death to many, the ark which hid Noah and

those with him floated safely, till the dry land began again to appear. In the ark of papyrus and amid the flags in that river, into which doubtless more than one Hebrew infant had already been thrown in accordance with the king's decree, the little one, hereafter called Moses, could safely rest. Can we doubt what we have said above, that as the word used of this paper reed vessel is the same as that in which Noah and his family were preserved alive, the mother, acquainted with the salvation of the patriarch, looked to God to preserve her precious son from death? Nor was she disappointed, though surely the manner of his deliverance had not entered into her mind. But man's steps and man's heart are in God's hands, to direct as He will. By Pharaoh's decree, the child ought to have been drowned. Naturally, any one in his house might have been viewed as a relentless foe; and the last person that Jochebed would have desired to set eyes on the child was the one who first espied the frail vessel. Pharaoh's daughter saw the ark, and commanded the maid to fetch it. God had directed her steps to the spot where the ark was placed, and God touched her heart to compassionate the infant as soon as she saw it. For the little ark brought to her, and opened, her eye lighted on the infant, and the infant wept. The feelings, surely, of a woman were at once called forth; those feelings implanted in the breast by Him, one of whose creatures was that little baby. At once she perceived it was one of the

proscribed race. Now was to be settled an important question. Should she side with her father, or take the part of the oppressed race? Duty, natural inclination, patriotism might have made her do the former. But the child wept, and her womanly tenderness was at once called forth. She had compassion on it, and resolved to save it, though perfectly aware it was the infant of one of the Hebrew women.

But what should she do with it? The infant's sister (Miriam, we suppose) now stepped forward, and offered to call a nurse of the Hebrew women. Pharaoh's daughter consented; a nurse was got. The child's own mother was now commissioned to care for it, and to bring it up as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. How Jochebed's faith was rewarded. Her infant, hitherto in danger any moment of death pursuant to the king's decree, was now to be preserved from death by the will of that king's own daughter.

How had God worked! He had guided the steps of the princess to the bank of the river; He had attracted her attention to that little mysterious-looking ark of reeds; He had moved her with compassion when she looked upon the weeping infant; He put it into her heart to bring it up as her own son.

What must the mother's feelings have been? Who but a mother dreading the loss of her infant can understand what passed in her soul, as she laid him in faith in the ark which she had made? Who but a mother can fully

enter into her joy, as she received him back, as it were, from the dead, to tend him with all a mother's devotion, in the happy consciousness that no one would now dare to touch or compass the death of her child. It was now beyond the reach of death, though the king's decree stood unrepealed. Drawn out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter, it never could be cast back into it. Faith, her faith, was rewarded, as she embraced once more her infant thus saved from death. But its salvation was of God.

To turn now to the other example. Moses had just died, and Israel were about, under Joshua, to cross the Jordan to take possession of their inheritance. Before that was effected two spies were sent, commissioned by Joshua to spy out the land. Their commission was to view the land and Jericho. God's purpose was, in addition to that, to save Rahab and her family—a name and person unknown then to any in the host of Israel. They entered the city strangers to every one within it, but their steps were directed to Rahab's house. Soon their arrival was reported to the king, who sent to her to demand their surrender. She refused, and hid them. Now the reason of her conduct came out, as she talked with them under cover of darkness on the roof of her house. Whilst God had been leading Israel to the bank of the Jordan opposite to Jericho, He had been working on the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, and had been working in Rahab, whom with all

her house He designed to save from the destruction impending over her people. "I know," she said, and thus disclosed to the spies what was going on—

"I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our heart did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. ii. 9-11).

Well had their steps been guided to that house where they learnt how God had been working for them on the west of Jordan. What was Jericho, with its walls and battlements, if the hearts of its defenders melted within them? But fear is not faith. All feared because of Israel; Rahab had faith. She received the messengers, and sent them out another way. "I know," she said, "that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you." She told them what she knew; she told them what she and the rest of her people had heard. "We have heard," etc. All had heard of the Lord's doings on behalf of Israel. All were afraid because of Israel. But all did not know that the Lord had given them the land. Rahab, however, did; and further she knew, and she confessed it, that the Lord their God was God in heaven above, and on earth beneath. Then He was the One true God. There was, there could be, no other. In the

midst of abounding iniquities, surrounded with idolatry and all its filthy rites, with altars and shrines on every high hill and under every green tree, that woman had learnt, and knew, that Israel's God was the true God, and that He had given them the land. She had no doubt of it. Her language was clear and precise. "I know," she could say. How God can teach a soul, and that in a way that nothing can shake, however unfavourable, humanly speaking, the surrounding atmosphere may be. "I know." Like the beggar, when his eyes were opened, who brushed away as cobwebs all cavilling and specious arguments by his simple announcement: "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see"; so Rahab, speaking of herself and for herself, unhesitatingly said, "I know." "I know." "We heard." What a difference was this. *She* had heard, and *she* knew, and had given proof of her faith, having hid the spies under the stalks of flax on the top of her house. She had taken their side, she had taken God's side, against her people and her country, and that at the risk of her life. "Faith cometh by hearing."

The God of Israel was the God of heaven and of earth. Then He must prevail; it would be hopeless to resist Him. He had given Israel the land; then the doom of those who opposed them was fixed, it was certain. Judgment on her people and on her land was at hand. She could not doubt it. She knew it, and that before a single

soldier of the host of Israel had crossed the Jordan.

Cities great, and walled up to heaven, her people could boast of; the Anakim they could point to; the Amorite power in the hill country, and the Canaanitish power in the open country, both as yet intact, they might speak of; but that one word, as it is in the original, *I know*, outweighed in her mind all possibilities, and effectually dispelled for her all doubt, as to the issue of the coming conflict. Hence, after telling the spies what she knew, she put before them what she desired.

Nothing could satisfy Rahab but the promise of salvation for herself and her family. She spake as one over whom a doom was impending, which, if possible, must be averted. A vague hope, resting on no real foundation, a fair speech on the part of the two men, nothing of that kind could satisfy her. She wanted an assurance on which she could rest, and a token to which she could turn. But the men were strangers to her. What did she know of them? Nothing. She would bring God into the matter, and make Him a party to the engagement. "Now, therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death" (12). Uncertainty she could not endure. Assurance of deliverance



from the coming judgment she craved, she desired: And by making God a party to the engagement entered into with her by those strangers, did she not evidence her confidence in the faithfulness of their God? What she asked she got. She asked for a solemn engagement on their part. They gave it her on the condition that she kept their visit a secret. She asked for a true token by which safety would be ensured to her and to all in her house. She got it, for the men said to her :

“ We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear, Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by : and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father’s household, home unto thee. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless : and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear ” (17-20).

So the men departed. As yet there was no appearance of the coming invasion. The spies had to hide three days on the mountains before they could venture to attempt the passage of the Jordan, which was now in full flood. Would they ever reach the river, and rejoin the camp of Israel? Jericho was aroused ; the country was searched to find them. Was the danger of an invasion really imminent? Looking at the river now in full flood, the men of Jericho might have taken heart. The river must subside ere that host can reach us, they might naturally have said. But Rahab felt she must act, so she put the scarlet line in the window, according to the word of the spies. Anybody, everybody

might see it, but she knew of what it was the token and the confession—the confession that she sought salvation from the coming judgment, the token that from the doom of her people she would be delivered. Did she wait to bind the scarlet line in the window till the city was closely invested, and all hope of its relief was cut off? One would suppose not from the narrative that is given to us (ii. 21). How or when Jericho would be captured she knew not; but as to its capture she was clear, for the Lord, she well knew, would give to Israel the possession of the land. She would not, she could not (may we not say it?) risk the chance of being taken un-awares. She had got the token; she would make use of it; so she bound the scarlet line in the window, confident that if the line was there, safety in the midst of judgment was assured to her.

Soon, very soon, was her confidence put to the test. The host of Israel crossed the Jordan; the river opened a way for them by divine power; and they invested Jericho. For six days they marched round it. Not a shout from the people was heard, not an arrow was shot into the city. For six days these tactics must have appeared to those within but a show of power without reality. The walls were just as strong on the sixth day as they were on the first. One can fancy the beleaguered garrison regaining confidence, as they saw the victors over the Amorite power east of Jordan acting in that fashion day after

day. Did Rahab remove the scarlet line when she saw the city still intact? We may be sure she did not. She knew the judgment would come, whatever might be the delay, and she knew her hope of safety lay in that line being then seen in the window.

But when would the crisis arrive? Who in Jericho knew that? God had fixed the day, and had acquainted Israel with it. But no one that we read of made it known to those within its walls. The seventh morning dawned. The host again went round that city doomed to destruction, but seven times instead of once. For the seventh time the trumpets were blown; then for the first time the people shouted, and the walls of that stronghold fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him. But where was Rahab? Her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall (ii. 15). The walls fell down at the shout of the people. But her house must still have stood intact; for the spies went into it, and brought out into a place of safety all that were therein (vi. 22, 23). Her house being on the town wall, enabled the spies to escape from the city though its gates were shut, and zealously guarded. Her house being on the wall, enabled the scarlet line in the window to be the more plainly seen by the invading host. Her house being on the wall, but evidently standing, though the wall right and left must have fallen down flat, demonstrates that God watched over her at that

solemn moment, and over all in that house ; and she found, and they found, there was security and salvation from destruction for all who took shelter behind that scarlet line.

At such a moment as the capture of a city, the assailants are not wont to be careful in their actions ; yet she proved, and all with her, that there was salvation for them, because the scarlet line was in the window. No one in that house had a hair of their head hurt, nor did Rahab lose one thing she had possessed. "They brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had" (vi. 23). The word of the spies was true. The token was all that was needed. What a thing it is to be safe from judgment in the very place where it is being executed.

She showed her faith in receiving the spies, and in sending them out another way ; so she was justified by works (James ii. 25). By faith she perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies in peace (Heb. xi. 31). She knew that God had given to Israel the land, so she took shelter in her house behind that scarlet line, believing the promise of those two strangers—the token *they* gave her. The way of security was pointed out by them. Her part was to obey, and to trust. She did what they told her ; she trusted to what they said. She found it was all that was required. She had put the scarlet line in the window, and she waited in confidence behind it. Those outside the city could see there was one within it who

counted implicitly on the promise of those two men.

So should it be with people now. Judgment is coming on the unbelieving, and on the ungodly. We know who is to reign, and to have everything put under His feet; and God, who has revealed this, has told us of the way of salvation in the words addressed to the Philippian jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts xvi. 31). There is security now for all who avail themselves of it. Rahab asked for herself and for her kindred. She desired salvation for them all, though then perhaps none of them knew what she knew. She learnt that they could be saved as well as herself, but only if they severally availed themselves of the shelter of the scarlet line. They could be saved with her, but none of them could be saved if they kept outside her house. Each must act in the appointed way, and keep within her house, in the window of which was that significant token.

In a position similar to that of Rahab between the departure of the spies and the fall of Jericho is every believer on earth now. The world may discern no catastrophe impending. Peace and safety may be its cry; but the believer, like Rahab, cannot risk being taken unawares. She knew she was safe only when she got the scarlet line bound in her window. Each one knows now he is safe, when he has trusted, and trusts to the

efficacy of the blood of Christ, believing on the Lord Jesus. Each member of her family could be assured of safety, when he or she had crossed the threshold of her house,—safe not simply because Rahab believed the spies, but because each one had taken refuge with her behind that scarlet line; for none could be lost who kept inside that house. What a company it was! Each one morally no better than others in Jericho, yet they were together marked out, as separated from all the rest, through having taken refuge from coming judgment behind that cord in the window. Behind that line, and within that house, was the only place of security, and there not because of the position of the house, nor because it was well built, but simply and solely because of the scarlet line which was kept displayed in the appointed place.

What lessons, then, do these two women—Jocbed and Rahab—afford us. The one did what she could for the salvation of her infant. She cast it on God. The other did what she was told for the salvation of herself, and of all her family who would keep with her in that house. What encouragement for parents to trust God for their offspring does Jocbed's history afford; and what a simple illustration of the way of salvation from eternal punishment does the history of Rahab and her household afford. Are all readers of this paper sheltered from judgment by the blood of Christ?



V.

Faith in a Written Word.



THE book of Esther is full of interest to any who would mark the activity of God in defeating designs of the common enemy. As has been often remarked, the name of God does not appear in any part of it; but the watchfulness of God over the best interests of man can be traced throughout. He never slumbers nor sleeps. No move, therefore, on the devil's part to thwart His designs escapes His cognisance; and if He allows the plans of Satan to be developed, it is that He may the more completely triumph over him.

Reading the book, we are instructed in events which especially concerned Ahasuerus (or Xerxes as he is better known in profane history), but events which also had an important bearing on the welfare of the human race. Of the king's wealth, and of his invasion of Greece profane historians have written,

recounting that portion of his history which really concerned only the actors in it. Of God's interposition to defeat the devil's attempt to ruin for ever the whole human race the book of Esther treats. To God do we owe that chapter in the world's history which illustrates at once His faithfulness and His desire to save sinners.

Vashti the queen set aside by the king, Esther, in the providence of God, is put into her place, after which the development of those events which so concern us all, begins its course. Haman, raised to power, could not brook the refusal of Mordecai to bow down to him. Determined, if possible, to wreak vengeance on the son of Jair (ii. 5), he persuaded the king to issue a decree to exterminate all the Jews in his kingdom. Political reasons were assigned why the king should accede to the suggestion of his favourite; and zeal for the king's service and realm were the professed grounds for Haman's activity in the matter. The king agreed, and issued a decree in accordance with Haman's desire, a decree to take effect in every province of the empire.

How easily can man become the tool of the enemy! Neither Ahasuerus nor Haman had the least conception of what they were really doing. Political considerations were put before Ahasuerus; personal motives swayed Haman. He scorned to put Mordecai alone out of the way. He would exterminate his people with him. Had Mordecai only



been killed to gratify Haman's spite, the guilt of shedding innocent blood would certainly have rested on his head, but men would not have thereby suffered irretrievable ruin, for Mordecai was a Benjamite, and not one of David's house. Satan, however, whose tool Haman was, had another and a far-reaching object in view, viz., to cut off not simply Jews in Shushan, but David's race, now back in Palestine by the favour of Cyrus, the progenitor of Ahasuerus, from whom the Saviour of the world was to come. Who perceived that? who could prevent it? One alone could and did prevent it, and we are quite sure He perceived it.

It was not the first time that a crafty plot of the enemy in this matter had been counter-acted; nor was it the last: and it is deeply interesting to remember, that however great might be the power on earth enlisted by Satan in his design, and however hopeless, humanly speaking, might be the possibility of resistance on the part of those whose lives were seriously threatened, God always opened up a way of deliverance, that the line through which the Lord was to come should never be broken. The Israelites in Egypt show this (Exodus i.); David, hunted by Saul, exemplifies it; Joash, preserved in the slaughter of the seed royal (2 Chron. xxii. 10), witnesses to it; and the deliverance of the Jews in the days of Esther confirms it. Had the devil then had his way, the Saviour, who was to be Abraham's seed and David's son, could never have appeared.

Fourteen centuries had elapsed, and five more were to run out, ere the seed promised to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 18) should come; but that line continued unbroken throughout the nineteen centuries which rolled by between Abraham and the Lord. Ever watchful to take advantage of any circumstances that might favour his ends, the enemy used men as his instruments to defeat God's purpose of salvation. Ahasuerus, the tool of Haman, Haman, the tool of Satan, and God allowing it all that He might triumph in the deliverance of His people, what a scene is this to contemplate! Blindness and spite on the part of man, malignity and craft on the part of the enemy, and fixedness of purpose and grace on the part of God, all this comes out to us in the book of Esther.

Haman succeeded in getting a royal decree for the destruction of all the Jews found in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. His work for that day was done. Activity was displayed by the scribes; the posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment. Then Ahasuerus and Haman sat down to their carousal. What is man! Those two, as far as they were concerned, had sealed the doom of the whole human race by the decree which was being promulgated; then, with lightness of heart, they sat down to drink! (iii. 15).

Haman's wrath against Mordecai, and his purpose against Mordecai's race, was not a feeling of the moment, nor, it would seem, was it kept concealed in his breast. For a

whole year, day by day, had the lot been cast before him, to ascertain, one presumes, when the propitious moment should arrive to broach his plan to the king (iii. 7). Now, believing it had come, the crafty favourite suggested it to the pliant sovereign, who gave ear to it, and gave his ring for it, that, sealed with the king's ring, the authenticity of the decree should be undoubted. The decree thus duly drawn up was published in Shushan, and copies of it were sent off in haste to the "king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province" (12). Hilarity might reign in the king's banqueting room, exultation doubtless filled Haman's heart, but sorrow and mourning were widespread. "The city Shushan was perplexed." "Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city with a loud and a bitter cry." "And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (iii. 15-iv. 3).

What caused all this sorrow? Haman's enmity to Mordecai had not been kept smothered in his bosom, nor can we suppose that Mordecai was unaware of it; yet we have no hint of any weight on that score burdening Mordecai's heart. What, then, changed the current of men's thoughts, engendered perplexity in the city of Shushan, and diffused

widespread, genuine, and deep sorrow elsewhere. *The king's decree*, the written word, confronted men—a word which would not be changed, a word which must have its fulfilment, unless some means of deliverance should in time be discovered. Haman's enmity in itself would have caused no sorrow, but the decree of death, issued by the one in whose hands was the power to kill, made all the difference.

We can imagine the feelings of any Jew as he read that proclamation, and saw that its authenticity was attested by the seal of the king. Just one year, and then death must overtake him; just one short year, and all happiness for him in this life would end; just one year, and his earthly possessions, gathered perhaps after years of patient self-denial, and days of anxious toil, would become the property of a stranger. Or suppose a young couple just starting in life suddenly meeting with that decree. All brightness and joy would depart; the hitherto rosy-coloured future would become dark with the clouds of the impending storm. That written decree would blight all their earthly prospects; and if their prospects were bounded by earth, what would they have to look forward to? The destruction of their race they would have to face, with no hope of deliverance from it. All that could encourage their enemies, and incite them to slaughter the Jews, was found in that decree. The authority of the law would be with them, the desire for plunder would stimulate them.

The written decree! What a change had that wrought! Objects, aims, which hitherto had engrossed many of them, must have appeared in a new and, may we not say it, in a truer light. Eternity can light up the present, and display it in its true colours. One brief year, and death would overtake them at its close. The decree they read. It was written, it was sealed with the king's signet—no man could reverse it. Who could administer comfort to those affected by it? A Persian had no fear of death by reason of it; it did not touch him. A Jew had no hope of life after its promulgation, if within the range of the king's dominions. Go where he might, from end to end of it, in no corner, in no secluded spot within the limits of the empire, was he safe. The decree was aimed against the race. So by virtue of his birth into this world, the Jew found himself threatened with death. How could he be indifferent to the terms of it! How could he be comforted with the certainty before him, as far as that decree could make anything sure, that the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month Adar, would see the termination of his earthly existence? Had any one tried to rally him, how could he have done it? *It is written* would have been the poor man's answer. *It is written* must have quashed all hope. *It is written* would have been a sufficient reply wherewith to expose the folly of all such endeavours. Clear and explicit were the terms of the decree; what it said that it meant.

Brought face to face with the written word, the vanity of much of the present and the solemnity of the future evidently weighed heavily on many a heart, for in every province there was among the Jews great mourning, and weeping, and wailing.

Mourning, weeping, wailing : an expression this was of the intensity of their feelings, and at the same time a confession of their helplessness to avert the calamity. But, as has been said (and how true it is), man's extremity is God's opportunity : so the Lord their God worked for their deliverance when everything seemed against them, and at a moment when it would least have been expected. It was when the earth was wrapped in the darkness of night. How often has this been seen ; an encouragement, surely, that in the darkest hour hope may spring up, for the Almighty, if He pleases, can interpose and work deliverance. It was at night that God wrought to bring Joseph out of prison. It was at night that Peter was saved from death. It was at night that He who should by death annul him that had the power of death, was born into this world. It was during the hours ordinarily devoted to sleep that the Lord rose. It was at night, too, that God began to work visibly for the rescue of the Jews from the doom which overhung them.

For three days all the Jews in Shushan, and Esther and her maidens in the palace, had fasted, preparatory to her venturing uncalled for into the king's presence. Now the answer

from God was to be vouchsafed. Esther, accepted by Ahasuerus, had invited him and Haman to a banquet. Haman's exultation knew no bounds, as he returned home that evening to tell of an invitation to a second banquet with the king and queen on the following day. But "on that night could not the king sleep" (vi. 1). Dreams sent by God to Pharaoh were the occasion of Joseph's liberation from prison. Sleep withheld by God from Ahasuerus resulted in the salvation of the Jews from the doom to which the king's decree had consigned them. Mordecai thereby came into prominence, and shortly afterwards into power: Haman got what he deserved, execution on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai; and the enemy, whose tool he had been, received a crushing defeat by the discomfiture of his plans just when all seemed in train for bringing them to a successful issue. "On that night could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him" (vi. 1-3). Two restless men were in Shushan that night Ahasuerus and Haman. Ahasuerus was deprived of

sleep by God that divine purposes concerning His people should be carried out. Haman, intent on the desire of his heart, could not wait for the month Adar to come to rid himself of Mordecai. He would at once secure his death on the gallows, to wreak vengeance on whom he had procured that decree which would wipe out the Jewish race from the king's dominions. Two restless men these were, both now to further God's designs. The one, the king, declared what was to be done to Mordecai; the other, Haman, had publicly to make it known throughout all Shushan.

Thus in the very hour when Haman counted on victory, Mordecai's personal deliverance from the doom designed for him was effected, and Haman was to witness it. Who could hope to have him hanged on the gallows, whom the king delighted to honour? Probably Mordecai was unaware of the imminence of his danger, till after his deliverance was accomplished. God's interposition on that night saved him from the gallows on the morrow. But the decree already issued, and published far and wide, was to take effect ten months hence. Was it merely, then, a respite accorded him till the month Adar came round? God was working for the deliverance of the race. How that could be brought about the history now narrates.

Esther's discovery to Ahasuerus of the plot resulted in Haman's execution, and that of his ten sons, thus extinguishing his race in the direct male line. It resulted, too, in the



exaltation of Mordecai to favour and power next to the king, and in the issuing of another decree, this time in favour of the Jewish race, "wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, upon one day, in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar" (viii. 11, 12). As far as the previous decree was sent, so far was this fresh one carried.

On the promulgation of the first decree the posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment (iii. 15). On this second occasion we read that Mordecai "sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels,<sup>1</sup> and young dromedaries," the swiftest animals being pressed into the service, and the messengers hastened, and pressed on by the king's commandment (viii. 10, 14). The king's acquiescence in the first decree all could see; the king's heartiness in making known the second all might remark.

And now how was this second proclamation received? To the former, neither the city

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<sup>1</sup> In the Revised Version, it thus stands: "Sent letters by post on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used to the king's service, bred of the stud" (ver. 10); and in ver. 14: "So the posts that rode upon swift steeds that were used in the king's service went out." The exact meaning of the original seems uncertain.

Shushan nor the Jews in the remotest corner of the empire were indifferent. To the promulgation of the second decree was any listlessness displayed? No; an eager interest in its contents was at once discernible. "The city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. And in every province, and in every city whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (viii. 15-17). What a change had been wrought. Perplexity gave way to gladness; feasting took the place of fasting. Why? The thirteenth of Adar had not yet come. The first decree stood unrepealed. Why this change? The *written word* of that second decree had made all the difference. Relief had come; a way of escape from that dreadful doom was offered the Jews. They believed it, and they acted as if they believed it. Liberty to stand for their lives, and to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, assured them of immunity from death, so they could wait in perfect confidence the approach of that once-dreaded day.

But observe: if they would escape the doom threatened by the first decree, they must stand up for their lives, and kill their opponents. Activity must characterise them, in accordance with the terms of the second decree; else did

supineness overcome them, death would be their portion. For they had enemies, though the king's decree showed he was favourable to their welfare; and the thirteenth day of Adar told its tale, and witnessed of the doom that would have overwhelmed them, had God not interposed, and moved the king's heart to grant Esther's request; for at Shushan the Jews slew of their enemies 800, and in the provinces 75,000. Great, indeed, had been their danger. God, however, wrought a good deliverance. But months before that day came, their sorrow was turned into joy by the appearance of that second decree, in the accomplishment of which they put implicit confidence—the *written word* they rested on. Further, they learnt that they were in the eyes of the king an accepted people, though the vast majority of them had never seen the king, and probably had never been at Shushan. But Mordecai had seen him; he was accepted before him; and all could know that, who learnt of his reappearance from the king's presence chamber clad in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a crown of gold upon his head.

How instructive is all this to us! The written word in those days spoke to people. They heard it, they believed it, they were affected by it according to the tenor of its communication. Now God, not Ahasuerus, has spoken to all of us, and has announced a coming judgment, in view of which He "commandeth all men everywhere to repent: be-

cause He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts xvii. 30, 31). But what is man? He is *more ready* to believe the decree of Ahasuerus than *the word of God*. All in Shushan, and all the Jews throughout the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, believed that first decree, and all concerned were affected by it accordingly. On Mars Hill the coming judgment was announced, and the appointment of a fixed day made known, and the Judge indicated. How was this divine communication received? Some mocked, some procrastinated, a few believed (32—34). That was the effect on the hearers. What has been the effect in the reader's case? Were that the only announcement from God, what hope could there be for any one of us? All of us by nature are children of wrath; all of us, too, have sinned. How then shall we escape?

Thank God, another communication has appeared, written, too, in the Scriptures of truth, a communication from the lips of the appointed Judge, telling us of a way of escape from the judgment. "He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life" (John v. 24). Who has listened to this, and believed it? As those decrees of Ahasuerus affected all the Jews, so do these divine an-

nouncements concern all of Adam's race who have heard them. Supineness in standing up for his life would have cost a Jew dear in the reign of Ahasuerus; supineness in the matter of the soul's salvation now must, if not corrected, result in everlasting perdition. Did any Jew doubt about his danger when he read the first decree? Did any doubt as to deliverance from death when he read the second decree? Must not his faith, too, in the king's favour to them have been confirmed, as he heard of Mordecai's reappearance from the king's presence with the token of Ahasuerus's favour? Every Jew knew that the acceptance of Mordecai by the king was the assurance of the acceptance of all connected with him—*i.e.*, all the Jews. Similarly, what room is there for us to doubt of the acceptance before God of all those on whose behalf the Lord Jesus is in heaven, as we know Him, who died for us to make atonement, now there, and crowned with glory and honour? What, then, have any to do to share in salvation? What did the Jews? They did what the decree told them. What, then, are any now to do? To act as God's gracious word in John v. 24 instructs them.





“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

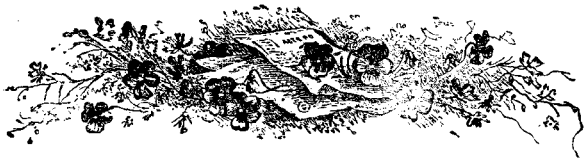
*Heb. ix. 27, 28.*



“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into (judgment) condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

*John v. 24.*





## VI.

### Divine Activity in Grace.



**T**HAT the moral Governor of the universe should deal in grace with guilty creatures, instead of meting out to each the due reward of his deeds, is a subject for unfeigned thankfulness. But how it comes that a holy God can show mercy to such without compromising His righteousness, belongs to the province of divine revelation to make plain.

Power belongs to God. All creatures owe their existence to Him ; so His right to deal with His responsible creatures according to their deserts is unquestionable. "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?" asks the Apostle. "God forbid ; for then how shall God judge the world?" (Rom. iii. 5, 6) is the immediate and conclusive answer. No one suffering from iniquity, or smarting under cruel injustice, would think that the evil done to him did not deserve to be punished. What sinners deserve, it cannot be an act of injustice on the part of God to inflict. As the Apostle asks, "How otherwise could God judge the world?" Who now would charge Him with

injustice for dealing in judgment with the antediluvian world? Who would plead that Sodom and Gomorrah should have been left unpunished? God's righteousness in visiting on them their sins all will admit. Nor would any, we suppose, question either the justice of Israel's punishment, or that of God's judicial dealing with Jerusalem. Once admit—and we cannot do otherwise—that those who sin wilfully deserve punishment, then every one on earth who has so sinned is liable, as far as he is concerned, to punishment at the hand of the Almighty. Nor can any specious plea of God being too merciful to punish iniquity be admitted on our behalf, without condemning the Almighty for His past dealings with men and nations.

Yet He is merciful. He announced this at Sinai, whilst proclaiming at the same time His divine attribute of righteousness (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). His mercy, then, cannot stand in the way of the maintenance of His righteousness. Nor conversely, as we can now say, does His righteousness stand in the way of the exercise of His mercy. Since, however, all have sinned (1 Kings viii. 46; Rom. iii. 23), on what possible ground can any hope for deliverance from suffering the just consequences of their guilt? To answer this momentous question we must turn to Scripture, to learn, as therein revealed, what God is, and what He has provided, that He may act righteously in grace. We have to turn away entirely from mere human thoughts,



and to be willing to hear what the Lord God will say to us.

Of God's nature we read, He is light, and He is love (1 John i. 5; iv. 8). All that is contrary to light is contrary to Him. Untarnishable holiness and inflexible righteousness must ever characterise Him. Now holiness, as one has remarked, is the necessity of His nature, whilst love is the activity of it. Since God is love, He can act in mercy and grace apart from the deserts of the guilty creature; but as He is light, He can only thus act in perfect righteousness. A sacrifice then, by which all that He is should be glorified, was necessary, if any sinful creature was to enjoy everlasting blessing. Who shall provide it? Who could provide it but One, that is God? So Scripture speaks: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Again, "We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 John iv. 9, 10, 14).

It will be seen in these passages that the motive for activity in grace is traced up to the love of God. Similarly in the Gospel of John, the Son of God, the sent One, thus speaks: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have

everlasting life" (John iii. 16). Again, we read in Ephesians (ii. 4, 5), the Apostle writing in words taught of the Spirit, "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Did God require a sacrifice, even the death of His Son, that He might righteously act in grace? Surely He did. Was it the Sacrifice which moved Him to act in love? No; for it was God who sent His Son to die. A glorious revelation of divine grace is this, which man would never have expected. For apart from it, man views God either as a Being who needs to be made favourable towards him, and His anger to be appeased, thus necessitating something to be done first by the sinner, or by some one on his behalf; or as One who is too merciful to punish the guilty, so man may live as he likes. Divine revelation corrects both these mistakes, in the simplest and most convincing way. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The necessity for a sacrifice is asserted, whilst the love which provided it is also revealed.

We would ask the reader to turn with us to a chapter in David's history, which in measure illustrates, and that in the order of New Testament revelation about God, the activity of His grace on the one hand, because of what He is, and the necessity of a sacrifice on the other, to assure the guilty of deliverance from deserved judgment. The history is related in

2 Sam. xxiv. and in 1 Chron. xxi., and provides instruction in a double way. In 1 Chronicles it is introduced to show us how David learnt where the place was that God had chosen for the erection of the house, and the altar of burnt-offering for all Israel. In 2 Sam. the same history comes in, but it is introduced in connection with God's dealings in government with that nation, which He had redeemed to be forever His people. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah" (2 Sam. xxiv. 1). God had dealt governmentally with David and his house (xii.-xx.) He had dealt governmentally with Saul and his house (xxi.) Now God would deal in government with Israel, chastising them through the act of their king.

On two occasions had God directed Moses to number the people. On the first it was done in connection with their encamping in the wilderness (Num. i.) On the second, it was enjoined with special reference to the different tribal allotments in the land (xxvi. 2). On each occasion he numbered from twenty years old and upwards, all that were able to go forth to war; the fighting strength of the congregation was thereby ascertained. Subsequent to their entrance into the land, God never commanded them to be numbered. There was then no occasion for this census. And Joab, with the captains of the host, well aware of that, deprecated before David such an act on his part. But God was angry with

Israel. Joab's entreaty was unavailing, for "Satan stood up," as we read in 1 Chron., "against Israel, and moved David to number Israel." God purposed to chastise them; Satan was the instrument allowed on this occasion to further that purpose. Nor is this surprising. He is a creature, so God can, and does, use him to carry out His wise purposes in His dealings with men. A lying spirit was permitted by God to lure Ahab on to his death at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings xxii. 21, 22). A messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh, buffeted Paul, that he should not be exalted above measure (2 Cor. xii. 7). Paul could deliver a man to Satan, that such an one might learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. i. 20). So Satan was allowed, for he can only act by divine permission, to move<sup>1</sup> David to number Israel and Judah.

Joab, the captain of the host, David's ready instrument on other occasions, undertook this service with manifest reluctance. It occupied him nine months and twenty days. Returning with the results of his mission, David's heart smote him, and he spoke to God, saying, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." For upwards of nine months David seems to have been callous about his sin. At length he woke up to it, without, as far as we know, any human instrument con-

<sup>1</sup> So the chronicler wrote, adopting the same word which the sacred writer had used in Samuel.

vincing him of the evil he had done. But God would not leave him in indifference about it. God worked on his conscience. He confessed his sin at night, and in the morning the prophet Gad visited him with the answer from God. "Take away the iniquity of Thy servant," had been David's petition. But the Lord had a controversy with Israel, so governmental dealing could not be averted. "Thus saith the Lord," ran the message of Gad in 2 Sam., "I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. . . . Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thyland? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to Him that sent me."

Punishment then could not be averted, but the form in which it should come it lay with David to choose, though within these prescribed limits. Years of famine he and Israel had recently experienced. For three years had that scourge prevailed. What misery would seven years of it inflict on them all. During this period a Sabbatical year would fall, throughout which the land must rest, and the nation would have to pass through it without the gracious provision of the sixth year's prolific crop. Seven years' famine would have been a heavy infliction indeed, as the history of such a scourge in the days of Joseph has made plain. Flight before his enemies was not an unknown trial to David. Years of

harassment at the hand of Saul he had experienced, and flight before Absalom he had known. Those trials, we may be sure, were not forgotten, though they were ended; and they must have taught him of what men were capable, if allowed by God to pursue him. So he chose the three days' pestilence, saying, "I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man" (ver. 14). He knew what man was. He was sure what God was.

"O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee," said Daniel. "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him," are the words of the same prophet (Dan. ix. 7, 9). What encouragement after failure! Righteous He is. Daniel owned and proved it. His condition as an exile attested it, for he shared in the fortunes of his people. But mercies and forgivenesses belong also to God, so grace can be manifested when failure is complete. Forgivenesses! Let us mark the language here. The prophet did not write forgiveness, but forgivenesses. He can forgive not one sin only, but many; for the ground on which one sin can be pardoned—the blood of Christ—is ground on which many, yea, all sins can be forgiven to those who seek it.

God's righteousness in visiting on men their sins Israel were about again to prove. God's mercies and His pardoning grace they were also afresh to know. "The Lord sent a pesti-

lence upon Israel, from the morning even to the time appointed; and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men." A solemn time it must have been. Pestilence was walking in darkness, and destruction was wasting at noonday. The destroying angel was actively at work, and no man was able to withstand him. Throughout the length and breadth of the land death was claiming its victims. Who would next be struck no one could tell. No remedy availed to cure the sick. No intercession, however urgent, succeeded in preserving the life of a beloved one. All joy must have fled; all energy for ordinary pursuits must have been paralyzed. God was working, and in power. Of old he had laid bare His arm, and worked in power on behalf of Israel; now His hand was outstretched, but in this deadly way against them. Could any charge Him with injustice? No. They deserved the chastisement, though David's act in numbering them was the proximate cause for this visitation. Helpless, how helpless were they all. Their only hope was in the mercy of God. He was their only refuge. "His mercies are great," said David. Now he was to prove that, though as yet he knew not how. The way of judgment had been declared; the way in which grace should be manifested was as yet a secret in the bosom of the Almighty.

"God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it." He is righteous. "And as he was destroying, the Lord beheld, and He repented

Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, "It is enough, stay now thine hand" (1 Chron. xxi. 15). God is merciful. Death had begun to be busy in Jerusalem. It had come close to David; but suddenly the plague was arrested. How was this? God had said to the angel, "Stay now thine hand." Why was this? "The Lord beheld, and repented Him of the evil." David had done nothing to arrest the march of disease and the ravages of death. The high priest and the prophet were equally powerless to induce the angel to pause for one moment in his work of destruction. No resource was there but in God. Was David mistaken in his thought about God? No; for the Lord beheld, and the Lord repented Him of the evil. He could act thus because of what He is. He repented, and arrested the arm of the angel, without solicitation on the part of any that we know of, and without any sacrifice offered up to induce Him to be gracious. New Testament revelation makes plainer the reason of this intervention. He is love, and as such can act according to what He is, without being first moved to it by any of His creatures.

What comfort this is for us. Love can be displayed, yea, has been displayed, before any sacrifice was offered up for God's acceptance. Were this not the case, who could be saved? Were He not love, His Son would never have come, sent by Him to make propitiation for the sins of the people. It was love which moved God to send Him; divine love, which



is its own motive for its activity. Moses of old had said, God set His love upon the people, because He loved them (Deut. vii. 7, 8). John the evangelist tells us, "God is love," and He has manifested it by sending His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him (1 John iv. 9).

Was there no need for a sacrifice? Surely it was needed. God's holiness and righteousness imperatively required it. But what holiness and righteousness demanded, divine love provided, and in the provision manifested love in a way and measure which no creature could have supposed. As in the days of David, the manner in which God could intervene in mercy was kept secret till He began to act; so, till the Lord came, and announced that God gave His only-begotten Son to be the sin-offering, no one could have known by whose blood it was that propitiation for our sins would be made.

But to return. "The angel of the Lord," we are told, "stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem" (1 Chron. xxi. 15, 16). The danger was great, and imminent to human eyes, though the angel was not using his sword; for his arm was held back by God, who had said, "It is enough, stay now thine hand." David did not see the angel dealing even a single blow. He only saw him after his hand

had been staved, though in the attitude of one ready to strike, for his sword was drawn, and was stretched out over Jerusalem.

What interest has this for us? David and the elders of Israel were powerless against that angel; yet the hand of that angel was held back from carrying death into every house in the city. Who had interposed on behalf of a guilty people? God, who repented Himself of the evil. God was that day rich in mercy toward Jerusalem, as David, the elders of Israel, as well as Ornan the Jebusite could attest. They all saw the angel standing with outstretched sword over Jerusalem, arrested in the act of destroying, yet ready, if ordered, to strike a deadly blow. His attitude was in perfect harmony with the people's deserts. They deserved judgment. His waiting with uplifted arm told of the sovereign mercy of God. Another thing was now witnessed by any who turned their eye from heaven to earth. David, accompanied by all the elders of Israel, clothed in sackcloth, were prostrate on their faces on the ground. What a scene. Men in the presence of a divine visitation, low in the dust before God. And one voice, and one only, that of the king, broke the silence, as he thus addressed God: "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Thy people, that

they should be plagued" (1 Chron. xxi. 17).

When Joab returned to David with the unfinished census of the people, the king entreated God to do away his iniquity. With that request God, as we have seen, could not then comply. Now he asks God that he and his father's house should suffer, and not the people of Israel. Again he requested what was not to be granted. Righteousness had demanded the divine visitation on the people, so judgment had gone forth. Divine mercy was now to be fully manifested, so God would not make David suffer in the stead of all Israel. None could in fulness be the substitute but David's Son and David's Lord.

As yet further judgment was only arrested, but not definitely averted, for the angel's sword was not sheathed. Till that should take place, who could be sure that the dreadful visitation was ended? But how could that be brought about? Neither Gad, nor David, nor all the elders of Israel in council could have ventured to declare. Were doubt and uncertainty to envelop this question, just then of the utmost importance to the whole city? God would not keep them in suspense for one single day. He alone could determine, and reveal on what terms that dreaded sword could then be sheathed.

This He did, for "the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar to the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite." The ark was on Mount Zion. The tabernacle

was at Gibeon (2 Chron. i.) The king was not to go to the ark, nor to wend his way to the brazen altar; but on Ornan's threshing-floor, the spot of ground still owned by a Jebusite, one of the ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem, an altar was now to be reared up. At once David obeyed. God had declared what should be done, and David would do it, that the plague might be stayed. The place was quickly bought, and the altar erected, the threshing instruments provided the wood, and the oxen were at hand for the sacrifice. The burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were offered up; and David called upon the Lord, who answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering. And now with that before God, which spoke of the death of His Son, the Lord commanded the angel, and he put his sword again into the sheath thereof.

The sword replaced in its scabbard, all could rest assured that further judgment, in connection with that for which chastisement had been sent, was now averted. The Lord commanded the angel, and he sheathed his sword. Israel were safe now, not that they deserved it, nor could ever have deserved it. They were safe, because the sword was sheathed in righteousness through grace. What brought this about? Was it not the sacrifice, which God had accepted, speaking, as it did, to Him of that which He only then understood, the sacrifice of His Son? How immediately and fully He responded. But how all was of grace. He arrested the arm of the angel be-

cause He is love. He was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed, because His righteousness and holiness had been typically cared for by the sacrifice. He acted in mercy then, and He acts so still, because of what He is, and judgment can be averted from those who deserve it by virtue of the sacrifice. Till the latter was offered, the angel's sword was not sheathed. That it might be offered, God arrested the angel in his work of destruction, and caused David to know that he should sacrifice to Him. He required the sacrifice. He made that known, and David found all ready to his hand, through the willingness of Ornan indeed, but surely through the goodness of God.

A simple story this is, but one fruitful in instruction. The God of the New Testament is seen to be the God of the Old. His love moved Him to act in mercy towards guilty creatures. In His love, too, He made known the need of sacrifice, to deliver the guilty from their justly deserved judgment. And we can now add, He has Himself provided the sacrifice. How secure all were on the evening of that day against the further visitation of the destroying angel. The sword was sheathed, consequent on God's acceptance of the sacrifice, made known by His answering David from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt-offering. How sure all may be of deliverance from the wrath to come who now believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, since God has raised Him from the dead.

A few words more. *First.* By the descent of the fire from heaven that day upon the altar of burnt-offering, David discovered the place on which the temple was to be built, and the altar reared up. Where the sacrifice had been accepted, the worship of Israel was subsequently to be carried on (1 Chron. xxii. 1). In principle it is the same now. True and acceptable worship is based on God's acceptance of the sacrifice.

*Second.* David offered peace-offerings as well as burnt-offerings that day. Suited indeed was this; for, whilst the latter were wholly consumed on the altar, of the former all concerned had their portion—God, the officiating priest, all the males of the priesthood, as well as the offerer. What thoughts, surely, must have filled the hearts that evening of those who partook of the peace-offerings according to God's appointment. They feasted on the sacrifice of which God had received His portion. It was communion with Him in the sacrifice. Who of men now know what it is to have fellowship with Him as respects the atoning death of His Son? Sorrow was turned into joy for all who had their portion of the peace-offerings that day. Can all the readers of this paper rejoice before God in the knowledge of certain deliverance from the wrath to come (1 Thess. i. 10), having learnt from the Word how God has been glorified by that sacrifice which has made full atonement for them?



## VII.

### Justification.

**J**USTIFICATION, as well as forgiveness, is a blessing announced to us in the Gospel, and occupies no inconsiderable space in New Testament revelation. Forgiveness assures us of immunity from everlasting punishment, and justification, which goes further, assures us of an indefeasible title to be in God's holy presence. This title, not earned by devotedness on the part of the creature, is bestowed by the unmerited favour of God. Now this line of teaching reminds us of God on His throne on the one hand, and of the creature as a responsible being on the other.

All of us have sinned, and all come short of the glory of God. None, then, could stand before Him if He were to enter into judgment against them. Of this the Psalmist was aware, and affirming it, deprecated most earnestly God entering into judgment with him (Ps. cxliii. 2). Hence God must come out in the

character of a Justifier, if any are to stand before Him without divine judgment overtaking them. Now it is in this character that He is revealed in the Gospel: "It is God that justifieth" (Rom. viii. 33). It is ungodly ones that He justifies (Rom. iv. 5). Of course no righteous person needs to be justified, or reckoned righteous. A sinner needs that, just because he is not righteous. The need, then, of justification, and the enjoyment of it before God, alike witness of the previous ways of the creature. Such an one had sinned. He was not righteous. He could not stand in God's presence by virtue of his own goodness. But on believing he is justified, and so can stand in all confidence, yea, in holy boldness in the presence of God.

Two questions here arise. 1st, On what ground can God in righteousness justify an ungodly creature? and, 2nd, How can the guilty creature come personally to share in this justification? The *ground* is the blood of Christ (Rom. v. 9). Hence, any and every one of the human race could be justified, so far as God's nature is concerned. That precious blood ever, as it were, before Him on the mercy seat, manifests His righteousness in justifying the ungodly. The way for any one to be justified is by, or on the principle of, faith. Everyone, however, is not willing to be justified. How many were there in the Apostle Paul's day, and how many are there still, going about to establish their own righteousness (Rom. x. 3), an impossibility, really,



if they only knew it : for such an effort betrays an ignorance of themselves, as well as of God. Of themselves ; for such can have no right sense of their guilt before God. Of God ; for they think He can lower the standard of His holiness and righteousness to the measure of their supposed attainment. That He never will. Hence banishment from God's holy presence must have been man's prospect for eternity, had not God been able in righteousness to justify the ungodly.

The need for justification, then, was urgent. The providing it by our God was gracious ; for we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. iii. 24). The effect of this act of grace on God's part is, that to the subjects of it He imputes not sin (Rom. iv. 8), and to no charge that can be brought against them will He give ear. "Who shall lay anything," we read, "to the charge of God's elect?" "It is God that justifieth : who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. viii. 33, 34). What a clearance, what a deliverance is this ! Hence there result to the one justified that he has peace with God, can rejoice, or boast, in hope of the glory of God, and further, can rejoice, or boast, in God (Rom. v. 1—11). And of such an one Scripture teaches, that he is justified *meritoriously* by blood (Rom. v. 9), *instrumentally* by faith (Rom. v. 1), and *declaratively* by works (James ii. 24). Apart from the shedding of the blood of Christ, and its acceptance before God, no justification of an ungodly person

was possible. Without faith in the testimony of God, set before the individual to rest on, no one could be justified. Without works, evidences of real faith, none could manifest their justification.

Thus the blood of Christ, faith, and good works have each their proper place, and a relation to each other in the matter of justification. Justified meritoriously by the blood of Christ, God being necessarily the Justifier, it is ungodly men whom, on believing, He reckons righteous. Hence justification meritoriously by good works is out of the question, and, though good works have their place, and that an important one, in the consideration of this grand subject—as we hope to make plain further on—they come last in order as Scripture shows, instead of first, as but too many would maintain; for in this, as in everything connected with man's salvation, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, coupled with the sovereign grace of God, holds the first and prominent place. In virtue of that precious blood God, as we have said, is able to justify the ungodly; and the testimony to be believed, in order to share in the grace of justification, we owe also to the sovereign favour of our God. He speaks, and the individual hears, and believes. Hence, it is plain, the testimony to be believed may vary at different times, whilst the principle on which a person is justified, *i.e.*, faith, remains the same.

Now, justification by faith is a constituent element of the gospel of the grace of God,

though the blessing of it has not been limited to those only who have heard that gospel. It was known, and the blessing of it celebrated, ages before the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. David sang of it (Psa. xxxii.; Rom. iv. 6, 8) a decade of centuries before the incarnation of the Lord, and Abraham was an example of it nine centuries nearly before David sat on the throne of the Lord, and thirteen centuries before Habakkuk wrote (ii. 4) that "the righteous shall live by his faith." To Abraham's history let us turn for an example, the earliest on record, of one justified by faith, and justified also by works.

Brought out of Ur of the Chaldees by the command of God, and told to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house to go to a land which God would show him, he went out, not knowing whither he went (Heb. xi. 8). The revelation vouchsafed to Abraham, then called Abram, must have acted on Terah, his father, for we read that he left Ur with him and Lot and Sarah, and reached Haran, a place situated on a tributary of the Euphrates, many miles north of Ur, the city of his nativity. There Terah died, and from it Abraham departed, still accompanied by Lot, his nephew, and all the substance that they had gathered, and all the souls they had gotten in Haran. At length he reached Shechem, in the land of Canaan, and, there by the oak, or terebinth tree (not plain), of Moreh he learnt from the Lord that unto his seed would He give that land (Gen. xii. 7). A memorable

day for him that must have been : a day and a place never, surely, forgotten. Once, and once only, as far as we know, was Abraham at Shechem. Once, and once only, did he pitch his tent by that tree, and heard beneath its shadow what he never forgot—the unconditional promise : “ Unto thy seed will I give this land.”

For a time Lot remained with him. Subsequently he parted from him. Then Abraham and Sarah were alone, as regards blood relations, a childless couple without kindred in their encampment. Just at that juncture, when the patriarch was sojourning between Bethel and Ai, the Lord confirmed, and apparently without solicitation on His servant's part, the promise made unto him at Shechem : “ Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward : for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth ; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it ; for I will give it unto thee ” (Gen. xiii. 14—17). Unconditional had been the promise of the land to Abraham's seed at Shechem. Unlimited in duration, he now heard, was to be the term of its enjoyment by his offspring. God, the God of the whole earth, who alone had the right and the power to dispose of any portion of the globe as He

pleased, had thus bound Himself to Abraham and to his seed. What a thing it was, and Abraham, once an idolater, must have felt it, to have to do with the one true God, who could act in such grace.

But the seed to inherit it, where was that? Some years had passed away since that memorable day at Shechem, but Abraham was still childless, and the prospect of a lineal descendant as remote as ever. Now fresh revelations are vouchsafed him (Gen. xv.), first about his seed (1-6), and next about the land (7-21). With the former only are we here concerned. "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house<sup>r</sup> is Eliezer of Damascus. And Abram said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed; and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. xv. 1-6).

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<sup>r</sup> So the original is now generally understood.

The patriarch simply took God at His word. God told him he should have an heir out of his own bowels. God told him that his seed should be like the stars, too numerous for him to reckon. He believed it, he rested on it. That question was for Abram a settled one from that day forth. "He believed in the Lord." Some, perhaps most, might have been tempted to ask as to the time and manner of the accomplishment of the divine promise, for all God's mind about that matter was not revealed to him that night. But Abram asked for no sign as to the birth of the heir, nor did he inquire when he should set eyes upon him, though he did ask for a sign that he should inherit the land. As regards the birth of the heir, he was satisfied with the bare word of God: and God reckoned his faith to him for righteousness. He was henceforth in God's eyes a justified man, justified by faith. Was he aware of this? Scripture is silent on the point. The important thing was, what was he in God's eyes? This is revealed: he was justified before God.

Short is the history given us in Gen. xv.; it just states Abram's question, God's answer, the faith of Abram, and the result in consequence to Abram. The Spirit of God, however, supplies us in the New Testament with some details not set forth in the Pentateuch. These are both interesting and encouraging. Interesting, as we learn thereby something of the exercise he passed through; encouraging, for it shows us, as written centuries after that

memorable night, that the faith of God's saints is ever remembered by Him. First we are told, that "against hope he believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." How much is conveyed in these words, "Against hope believed in hope." How they tell us in connection with what follows, of the faith of the patriarch through the long fifteen years yet to run ere Isaac appeared. Neither probability nor reasoning were allowed to outweigh the authority of the divine promise, for "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that what He had promised he was able also to perform" (Rom. iv. 18-22). Strong, childlike, and unswerving was his faith: God's power and God's faithfulness to His word were like rocks beneath his feet. On them he took his stand, assured of his ground. God spoke, Abraham heard, and believed implicitly the divine communication, and, therefore, it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.

Are we to be satisfied in just admiring Abram; eulogising his faith, but reading his history as that which does not concern us? No. "It was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him" for righteousness; "but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised

again for our justification" (Rom. iv. 23-25). The gospel of the grace of God was no after-thought in God's mind. When Moses, by the Holy Ghost, wrote that chapter of the patriarch's life, God was looking on to the death and resurrection of His Son, and to the coming of the Holy Ghost, consequent upon which that gospel could be preached, and through receiving which we are saved (1 Cor. xv. 2), and believing on God, who raised up His Son from the dead, we are justified. Abraham was justified by faith. On this principle, and on this alone, it is, that we are justified, though the testimony given to Abraham is different from that given to us. God spoke to him about his numerous seed. He speaks to us about the death and resurrection of His Son; He was delivered for our offences, He was raised again for our justification.

All charge of guilt against those for whose offences Christ was delivered must be settled, and settled for ever, since He who bore them is risen without them. God raised Him from the dead; God is perfectly satisfied with His sacrifice; God is infinitely glorified by it. No imputation of guilt, then, thank God, can rest on those for whose offences He was delivered. Now, who are authorised to take their place in that class? Those who believe on Him (*i.e.*, who put their confidence in Him) who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. Abraham believed in the Lord: we believe on God. It is the same One whose word he



trusted that we are to trust. Abraham believed in Him who quickened the dead; we put our confidence in God, who has raised up His Son from the dead. With Abraham it was, what God *would* do: with us it is, what God *has* done. Simple, how simple is the way of justification for ungodly ones. It is the taking God at His word, without looking to our feelings, or balancing probabilities. God has spoken: the soul that hears Him, receives His word, and believes on Him, so is justified by faith.

Very simple this is, some one may say. It is simple. Have I only to believe to be justified? such an one may ask. We have to believe on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, we reply. Is this faith, then, a mere assent of the mind? By no means. "Faith without works is dead" (Jas. ii. 26). God knows the moment that a person really believes His testimony concerning His Son. He, who reads the heart, waits not therefore for works to be seen, to justify that soul before Him; but faith, where real, is evidenced by works. Hence there is justification by works, as well as justification by faith. It is important for all to remember this. On this James insists most strongly (ii. 14-26), "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? . . . . Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest

there is one God; thou doest well: the demons also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is barren."<sup>1</sup> Where faith, saving faith exists, there is spiritual life. Now that life will be manifested in displaying, in some measure, fruits of the divine nature (vv. 15, 16), and in an activity in accordance with that which is believed. Where these are wanting, faith, being without works, is barren, fruitless. A belief in a fact, without the proper effect of that fact on the individual, is of no manner of use! The demons believe there is one God, but do not serve Him. Men, too, may avow their belief in a God, and may descant on the wonders of creation, but of what profit is that, if the divine Being remains to them simply an abstraction, One with whom they have no intercourse, and of whose revelation they remain in ignorance, without the slightest intention or inclination to give heed to it? "Faith without works is dead." Hence justification by works is as much to be insisted upon as justification by faith; not, indeed, that by the former one becomes entitled to a place before God, but it evidences that one has a standing in the divine presence.

Important, then, is this line of teaching, and, surely, especially so in a day when sovereign grace is so freely preached, and in some cases seems to be very easily laid hold of. On this, then, James insists, and illustrates what

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<sup>1</sup> Or "fruitless," i.e., without result. This seems the best reading.

is meant by examples from the Old Testament. He adduces two, viz., Abraham and Rahab, each of them remarkable in its way. Rahab was justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way. She took God's side at the risk of personal danger. Very ignorant of truth, doubtless, she was; of a written revelation she knew nothing; but she acted on what she believed, and her receiving the spies, and sending them forth another way, evidenced her faith. Her example then is remarkable for this, that great intelligence is not needed for one to be justified by works. Simplicity and reality are qualifications for this. The person acts because he believes: God is before the soul. There may be reality without much intelligence, and there may, alas, be much mental intelligence without reality.

The other example, that of Abraham, is equally remarkable. He had years before been justified by faith. God did not need any works on Abraham's part to manifest to Him his faith. He who reads the heart knew well the moment that Abraham had taken Him at His word. Abraham knew that he believed in the Lord, but he was called to make proof of it. And so the one who is conspicuous for justification by faith, and as such is the father of all them that believe (Rom. iv. 11), is equally conspicuous for justification by works. God thus, at the outset of this teaching, intimates that the two are inseparably connected; and this must be

insisted on, whilst care is taken to observe, and to point out their order. Justification by faith precedes justification by works. So Abraham was justified by faith in Gen. xv.; he was justified by works, as James points out, in Gen. xxii. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" or perfected. "And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James ii. 21-23). Was he, then, justified twice over, first by faith, and then by works? No; he was justified by faith in Gen. xv., and the Scripture which had declared that was fulfilled. It was seen to be true in Gen. xxii. The surrender of his son to death evidenced how real was his faith.

Thus Gen. xv. furnishes us with the history of Abraham being justified by faith, whilst Gen. xxii., to which James turns us, affords a manifestation how really he had years before believed the word of God. But here another Scripture comes in (Heb. xi. 17-19), which acquaints us with what passed in the patriarch's mind when he bowed to the command of the Almighty: "Accounting," we are told, "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." But why did he look for Isaac's resurrection from the dead, had he

died that day? Because God had told him of a seed as numerous as the stars, and that in Isaac should his seed be called (Gen. xxi. 12). God's word was bound up with Isaac being on earth, till he in his turn should have children. Abraham believed that; he rested on it; and therefore in obedience to God could sacrifice, if need be, that son. How precious was his faith to God! And we see from the Hebrews that it is not forgotten, since that which the history did not record, the Spirit of God has revealed in Christian times. "Faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect."

The principle brought out in Abraham's history should be illustrated and manifested in the history of every saint of God. Circumstances will vary, so the manifestations of faith will vary. Rahab was justified by works in one way, Abraham in another. Perhaps no two saints will be justified by works *precisely* in the same way. Remembering this may serve to keep any from imitation, a snare which has to be guarded against. Of this one thing, however, let each be fully assured, that "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James ii. 26).





“It is God that justifieth.”

*Rom. viii. 33.*



MERITORIOUSLY BY BLOOD :

“Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” †

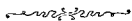
*Rom. v. 9.*



INSTRUMENTALLY BY FAITH :

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

*Rom. v. 1.*



DECLARATIVELY BY WORKS :

“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” † † †

*James ii. 24.*





## VIII.

### **Justified from all things.**

“**B**Y HIM, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts xiii. 39). Such was part of the glad tidings set forth by Paul, on a Sabbath day, in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, to a company composed of Jews and proselytes, addressed by him as “men of Israel, and ye that fear God.”

Sent forth in company with Barnabas, from Antioch in Syria, by the Holy Ghost, for the work whereunto He had called them, we gather from this evangelistic discourse of Paul the character of the gospel which they preached, and which attracted such crowds to listen to them. “Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man ”

(*i.e.*, Christ) "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by" (or, in) "Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by" (or, in) "the law of Moses." What an announcement to make in a synagogue of the Jews, and that after the reading of the law and of the prophets! What were the appointed portions of each which were read on that Sabbath day the historian has not recorded, so we cannot turn to them. But the law pointed out to Israel what they ought to do. The prophets provided a ministry of God to the people who had failed, reminding them of that which the law had enjoined, and announcing judicial dealing in government with those who had sinned, with predictions also of future blessings under the personal reign of David their King (Hos. iii. 5), the Messiah, the Christ of God (Luke ix. 20). But He had not appeared in power. The day of national deliverance had not come; of that all were conscious. Their position as part of the dispersion, and their location in Pisidia, was a standing witness that the nation had failed in the past, and that Messiah's appearance in power was an event still to be desired. Under such circumstances it was, that the Apostles Barnabas and Paul (Acts xiv. 14) visited that region.

Invited by the rulers of the synagogue to speak, if they had a word of exhortation, Paul stood up and addressed them—not to exhort them, as probably they had expected, to keep the law which all had broken, but to



preach the glad tidings of the grace of God. Tidings like that they had never listened to. Good news, such as their rulers had never declared, those Jews, Barnabas, of the tribe of Levi, and Paul, of the tribe of Benjamin, unhesitatingly set forth. How was this? They came with a message from God, the God of Israel, who at sundry times and in divers manners had spoken in times past unto the fathers by the prophets; for He had now spoken in the Son (Heb. i. 1, 2). They came, because Messiah had appeared, had died on the cross, had risen, and had sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. They came, because they were sent forth by the Holy Ghost to preach the glad tidings of the grace of God.

The rulers could tell them, perhaps had often done it, of the new covenant which Jehovah will make with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, under which the people will enjoy forgiveness of their sins. Paul, however, preached unto them forgiveness as a present blessing, and taught them about justification likewise. The effect of this was marked and immediate; for "as they went out" (so we should read the passage), "they besought that these words might be preached unto them the next Sabbath" (ver. 42). As yet enmity was not aroused, nor was jealousy stirred to resist the simple and free proclamation of divine grace, suited for all, and especially so for those born under the law. For such, if they wilfully remained

under it—*i.e.*, kept to Judaism—their case was hopeless, since no amount of devotion in the future could make up for failure in the past. So no one on that ground could get free from the curse, which the Levites had audibly and solemnly pronounced in the days of Joshua in the valley between Ebal and Gerizim, and to which all Israel, standing half of them on the one mountain and half on the other, had responded by a loud “Amen” (Deut. xxvii. 11-26; Josh. viii. 33-35). They needed, therefore, a redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant (Heb. ix. 15). Now that was provided for by the death of the Mediator of the new covenant; so Paul could unhesitatingly declare, that “by” (or, in) “Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Evidently this language was well understood by the audience on that occasion. No one seems to have been puzzled by it; all apparently comprehended it; all desired to hear these words preached again on the following Sabbath; whilst as the immediate result, and as the earnest of the work that was to go on at Antioch, many of the Jews and of the religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, after the synagogue had broken up; and they speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. It seems, however, reserved for these days to find a difficulty in these words of Paul, where none really exists. “By Christ” (or in Christ)

“all that believe are justified from all things,” so preached Paul. What did he mean by the phrase “by” (or, in) “Christ” in this connection? The passage makes it as clear as noon-day, and scripture elsewhere confirms it (Gal. ii. 17; iii. 11; v. 4). Justified *in Christ* is always used in contrast to being justified *in the law*. Does justified *in the law* mean justified by being in the law? Of course not, every one will say. No more, then, does justified *in Christ* mean justified by being in Christ. The phrase *justified in* tells of the cause of justification, indicating that it is in virtue of something referred to, whether the law, Christ, or His blood (Rom. v. 9). Let the reader remember what has been just stated, that justified in Christ is contrasted with justified in, or by, the law, and any difficulty as to the phrase will vanish at once. Scripture is here its own interpreter.<sup>1</sup>

“Justified from *all* things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” What a full deliverance was this; what a message for groaning, burdened consciences was that day announced! No charge would

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst on this point, we may notice a phrase, viz., “Justified in a risen Christ,” which has gained some measure of currency amongst Christians. Testing it by the only standard, it must be condemned and rejected. First, it is unscriptural in form. One may search the sacred volume from end to end, but shall find nothing to support it. Certainly Rom. iv. 25 gives no countenance to it. Secondly, as it is used it is misleading; for it leaves out of view the necessity for Christ’s ascension for us to be in Him at all. Thirdly, it detracts from the all-sufficiency of the value of His blood for our justification before God. We are justified by, or in, His blood (Rom. v. 9). Was the Lord’s resurrection needed to add value to His blood in God’s eyes? Every true soul will abhor such a thought.

then be listened to by God, however true it might be, if brought against those who by Christ are justified. One can imagine the joy of Paul, as he set forth this in the audience of an attentive company. For years afterwards he wrote on this theme somewhat in the language of exultation, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. viii. 33, 34).

One can well understand, too, that the congregation, listening to such an announcement, desired the same words to be preached to them on the next Sabbath. Nor was it to be wondered at that the city was stirred; for such a declaration as Paul had made, though primarily addressed to Jews, could include within its terms Gentiles as well. "From which *ye* could not be justified by the law of Moses" concerned, of course, the Jews, and told them of a blessing they never could acquire through the law. "By Him *all that believe* are justified from all things" evidenced that the grace of justification was within the reach of the Gentile equally with the Jew. All that believed could share in it. No wonder, then, that on "the next Sabbath came almost the whole city together to hear the word of the Lord" (ver. 44). Jews and proselytes, it would seem, formed the audience on the first occasion; <sup>1</sup> Jews, proselytes, and Gentiles together

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<sup>1</sup> Remembering this, the right reading of ver. 42, noted above, will commend itself to the careful reader.

flocked into the synagogue on the second. God had a message for men who had sinned, and He inclined that large company to attend, and to hear it. Never probably before was there such a congregation gathered within that synagogue; never probably again did its walls resound with such glad tidings. Did God cease to be gracious? No; but men, those who ought to have been the first to welcome it, began deliberately to show themselves unworthy of everlasting life. So, as has often been the case in subsequent ages, the tide of blessing still flowed, but in a new direction, as it were. Like a swelling river, which shifts its channel when some obstacle is put in the way of its rolling flood, so the *river of God's grace could not be stopped*, but made its way elsewhere, leaving those who opposed it like vessels stranded on the shore, exposing their folly, and their wickedness too, who thus sought to dam up the current, that it might run only in a narrow channel of their selection. A solemn warning it was for all of the folly of resisting the truth of God.

“Justified from all things!” Who could lay anything to the charge of the participants in this favour? Was doubt or uncertainty to linger in any one's mind who believed? Were the accusations of the enemy to haunt the individual with the fear that, after all, he might be condemned? That would not be the desire of God. He speaks, and speaks on this important subject in the plainest way,

that men, if they are willing to hear, may know on God's authority how every question of guilt is settled, and hence they may enjoy peace with Him.

We would now invite the reader to turn with us to a chapter in the prophet Zechariah which will illustrate this. The Lord, in chapters i., ii. of that prophet announces the grace that is to be shown to Jerusalem after all her failure. She shall be rebuilt, and shall be inhabited as villages without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein, and the Lord will dwell in her midst (ii. 4, 5). But blessing in the future after failure in the past necessitated the putting away of guilt. Hence following directly on those gracious announcements, which the Lord was so ready and desirous to make known, we have in chap. iii. Joshua, the high-priest, standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan, or the adversary, standing at his right hand to resist him (literally, to be his adversary). Now Joshua, as the high-priest, was the representative of the nation before God. What God did for him was to be regarded as done for the nation. If the high-priest was accepted, the nation represented by him was accepted also.\*

What a scene! The central figure was the Angel of the Lord, elsewhere called the Angel of His presence, the Messenger, or Angel, of the covenant. Before Him stood Joshua. At Joshua's right hand was the adversary, Satan. In the background, as it were, but witnesses of all that went on, were others, ministers of

Jehovah to do His pleasure (4). Joshua remained perfectly silent. At length the Angel spoke, and His words, the only ones of importance for us to know, have been recorded.

But what was Satan about? He was doing the work of an adversary to Joshua, who stood there in filthy garments, and of course, through Joshua, opposing Jerusalem and Israel. Now how came Joshua's garments to be filthy? The nation, which as high-priest he represented, had sinned, and he himself, of course, had personally sinned likewise. What answer could he then make to the accusations of Satan? The garments were a proof against him which he could not gainsay. There was no need for any false accusation on the part of the enemy to increase the chance of conviction. Most probably all that Satan said was true; there was no reason, either, for exaggerating one single offence. Neither falsehood nor exaggeration are generally resorted to where the charge is too clear to be refuted. Joshua's garments were enough, and, if all depended on his defence, conviction was certain.

The devil was there in the character of prosecutor. Was it to take God's side against evil, the advocate of offended majesty? Doubtless he had helped on, though he had not begun, the failure of the people. Man yields to him, and then becomes his tool. Satan's activity had surely contributed to the state of those garments. Did he minimise Joshua's guilt? Did he plead any excuse on his be-

half? Did he sue for mercy for the sinner? Did he, like the penitent thief, acknowledge his part in what Joshua had done? We are sure he did not. Just as many poor creatures on earth have found, that the one whose tool they had been, and who had urged them on in the course of sin, did not befriend them in their trouble, but the opposite, so Satan was there, not to befriend, but to be the enemy; not to excuse, but to accuse; not to be the advocate for Joshua, but the busy advocate against the one whom, he well knew, could say nothing in vindication of, or even in extenuation of, his conduct.

Evidently he was allowed to say what he wished, and all he wished. And Joshua was silent; what could he say? Should judgment go according to his and the people's deserts, a sentence of banishment for ever from the divine presence must be pronounced. Nothing that Joshua could have urged could have mitigated the justly deserved penalty. What a moment! The sinner in the presence of the Judge; the sinner's mouth shut; the adversary pressing all he could against him. Who would now speak? The voice of the Angel of the Lord was heard, and He addressed Himself first to Satan: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (iii. 2).

Were the devil's accusations false? We have no hint of that, but rather the contrary. Joshua was a brand plucked out of the fire.



How this spoke of his danger—plucked out of *the fire*. How it spoke, too, of worthlessness in itself—a *brand* plucked out of the fire! Could nothing more favourable be said of Joshua, and those he represented? Nothing. He and they deserved punishment. What arrested it? Could a brand pluck itself out of the fire? Could it arrest the progress of the flame? No more, then, could Joshua do anything to arrest the judgment which was deserved. But just as another might intervene, and deliver the brand from the fire, so God can come in, and righteously deliver from punishment those deserving it. Silence became Joshua; silence becomes the sinner. But what a thing to know, that when dumb before God because we have sinned, He can speak and set us free, and make us at home in His presence. God convinces of sin that the mouth may be stopped, and the person become guilty before Him, in order that He may then speak, and announce how *He* can justify the ungodly.

After rebuking the devil, and refusing to listen to his accusations, the Angel of the Lord spoke to them that stood by. In a coming day the Lord will address the angels, His ministers that do His pleasure, and tell them what to do with the tares sown in the field. Was it to carry out a sentence passed on Joshua that He here commanded them? Angels will by-and-by come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire (Matt. xiii.

49, 50). But now the command went forth not to take Joshua away, but to minister to him by changing his raiment. "Take away the filthy garments from him."

The filthy garments ordered to be removed, the Angel now for the first time addresses the high-priest: "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment," or (as the Revised Version gives it), "rich apparel." "I have caused to pass," "I will clothe," all this proceeded from the Angel. He would do it without reference to Joshua's deserts; He would do it of His own sovereign grace. And from the Angel of the Lord Himself Joshua and all were to hear it. All that could be urged against Joshua had doubtless been pressed with an ability, a zest, and a subtlety such as the most skilful advocate on earth could never equal. But it was all in vain. "Take away the filthy garments," was the answer to it all. To the charges, however true, the Angel of the Lord refused to listen. All learnt that, even Satan, Joshua, and those who stood by. All could see too, since Joshua was clothed with rich apparel, that every stain of sin was for ever removed, never again to be seen.

How true indeed is it, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom. viii. 33, 34). If ability and persistency could prevail, surely the devil would have succeeded. Joshua's iniquity, however, was

passed away from him, and he stood there clothed in new and rich attire, fitted to be in the divine presence. And now the devil is silenced, for the Angel of the Lord has spoken, and silenced him before God *for ever*.

The reason for the Lord's action, then not declared, has since the cross been made plain; for "now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth a mercy-seat through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii. 21-26). In virtue of the then future sacrifice, God could say to Joshua, "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel." In virtue of that sacrifice, now completed and accepted, God justifies ungodly ones. Let the sins be ever so black—the charges ever so true—to none of them will he listen, if the sinner has really believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; and He has made known and has displayed how it is that He is perfectly righteous in doing that.

Does any believer on the Lord Jesus Christ entertain one lingering doubt, that perhaps, after all, he may meet with his deserts? Let such an one pause, and reflect that never was there a better opportunity for convicting an offender whom God had chosen, than when Joshua stood before the Angel in his filthy garments, and Satan undertook the part of prosecutor against him. Signally defeated then, he will be as signally and finally defeated in any similar cause which he may espouse; for the Gospel is clear, simple, and encouraging, that by Christ, all that believe are *justified from all things*, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts xiii. 39).





THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION!



“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

*Rom. iv. 8.*



“Take away the filthy garments from him. . . . Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment,” or rich apparel.

*Zech. iii. 4.*



“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

*Rom. viii. 33, 34.*

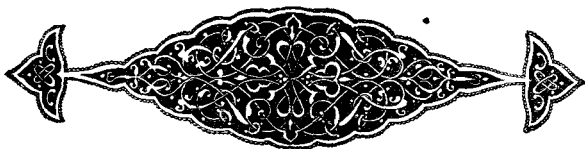




“And by Him  
(Christ),  
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*Acts xiii. 39.*





## IX.

### The Opportune Moment.



MAN, nameless to us, was healed in sight of the pool of Bethesda (John v.) alongside of which he had lain waiting for the periodical moving of the waters. How long he had been there we know not; but for thirty and eight years he had been afflicted with an infirmity for which there was no known cure, except the healing virtue of those waters, provided he had sufficient strength to avail himself of it. Strength for that, however, on his part was wanting, so to be for ever on earth an incurable was the prospect before him.

But God had visited His people; His Son, the virgin's Child, was on earth, and going

about doing good. He saw him ; He knew he had been a long time in that case. He said unto him, " Wilt thou be made whole ? " The time, the hour so long looked for, but hitherto in vain, had at last come. Healing was within his reach, calling on his part only for the obedience of faith. He heard the word, he obeyed it, and he left the precincts of that pool well and strong. Power in grace had been exercised, and he was the subject of it. What number of sick folk he left there when he arose, and took up his bed, and walked, is not recorded ; all that we know is that he had been one of a large number who lay there, and of his healing alone on this occasion have we any intimation.

Healed on the Sabbath day, the prejudices of the Jews—prejudices which really received no countenance from the Word, resting, as they did, solely on rabbinical teaching—were immediately aroused ; and the Jews persecuted the Lord, because He had healed the impotent man on that day. The Lord's calm but blessed words, " My Father worketh hitherto and I work," which should have bowed the hearts of all who heard them with deepest thankfulness that divine grace and power could work on behalf of sinful creatures, only stirred up afresh animosity against Him, and now " they sought the more to kill Him,"<sup>1</sup> because He not only had broken the Sabbath,

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<sup>1</sup> According to the best-attested reading, the words in verse 16, " And sought to slay Him," should be omitted. The Jews sought His death on this occasion consequent on His words in verse 17.



but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (John v. 18).

Upon this the Lord revealed what His opponents had never dreamt of—the importance of the moment for them, and the imperativeness for everlasting bliss of hearkening to Him whom they sought to kill. The impotent man had reaped a blessing from obedience to the Lord's voice. A greater blessing was now within the reach of every one, if they would receive it: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (ver. 25). Quickening power by the voice of the Son of God was being exercised: "And they that hear shall live." The importance of the opportunity was made evident. Man's condition by nature—dead in trespasses and sins—was here affirmed; his need was declared, and the way of meeting it was announced. Man needed that which by no effort of his own He could procure—spiritual life. Now that life, everlasting in its duration, was brought nigh to every one who would receive it. Discussion as to the means of obtaining it was to be henceforth at an end. All uncertainty as to the way of acquiring it was set at rest for ever for the true disciple, by the announcement on the part of the Lord, that the "Son quickeneth whom He will" (ver. 21), just as He had healed at Bethesda whom He would. Sovereign grace was in exercise, as sovereign power had been display-

ed, grace which in God's time should flow out far and wide irrespective of national distinction, or personal merit, and which was then offered to all who heard of it. Who would avail himself of it? Who could? "They that hear" (or, perhaps better, have heard) "shall live" settles that. Those words were the words of the Son of God.

The hour had begun; for centuries, thank God, it has run on. Will it always last? The same book which tells of its commencement, warns all of its close. The Gospel in any form will in time cease to be proclaimed. That form of it called the Gospel of the Grace of God (Acts xx. 24), the Gospel with which we are familiar, and which began first to be proclaimed at Pentecost, may cease any day, by the Lord's descent into the air for His saints (1 Thess. iv. 16), leaving no prospect but judgment for those who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. i. 8). The Gospel of the Kingdom, too, preached by the Lord when He was on earth, which, now in abeyance, is to be resumed after the rapture (Matt. xxiv. 14), will not for ever be in season. When the solemn hour of God's judgment shall arrive, those glad tidings even will become out of date. The offer of grace, or the time of forbearance, will not, then, always last; hence, as we read (2 Cor. vi. 2), "Now is the accepted time; . . . now is the day of salvation."

What a space of time has that hour covered, the commencement of which the Lord re-

vealed, witnessing to the forbearance of God and of His readiness to save. Of old He waited one hundred and twenty years before He sent the flood; for upwards of eighteen centuries has He now waited, ere dealing righteously in judgment with a world which crucified His Son. What a little span of time, however, is allotted to any individual in which to accept salvation—just the few fleeting years of his mortal existence, after which his future will be found irrevocably fixed. The importance of the moment who can over estimate? The folly of trifling with the opportunity what words can too strongly denounce? “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. ii. 3) is a question which many would do well seriously now to consider. It was said of Jerusalem, that she knew not the time of her visitation (Luke xix. 44). Her capture by the Romans, and her subsequent desolations, are standing witnesses of her folly in that respect. May none whose eyes alight on these lines have to regret in another world, and in a condition out of which there will be no deliverance, similar folly displayed by them in this life. In the hope that the needed lesson may be fixed in the memory of some, we would now draw attention to a chapter in David’s history recorded in 1 Samuel xxv.

The prophet Samuel had died, and David, the Lord’s anointed, was still persecuted by Saul. An exile from house and home, he had to dwell in the wilderness, or wherever he

could, the tribe of his fathers affording him shelter within its limits by reason of the natural features of the country, though the men of Judah as a whole were anything but favourable to the object of Saul's persistent hatred. David's cause in those days was not popular; success, which makes so many to rally round a standard, had not attended his steps. To cast in the lot with him at that time was no light matter. Rewards he might promise, but he could not bestow (1 Sam. xxii. 7). Temporal interest, and that which sways a mere worldling, would lead all of that class to have nothing to do with him. A time-server would find no inducement to declare for the son of Jesse. Who was David? such an one might say. When he had Saul in his power in the cave, did he not forego his opportunity? What folly to be on his side, and to share his present fortunes, who must have so little confidence in his own cause, that he could not, under the most favourable circumstances, strike a decisive blow on his own behalf (1 Sam. xxiv. 6, 7). Thus worldly wisdom would reason, but only to demonstrate its folly; for the position of David provided the opportunity for showing an interest in God's purposes by serving the man of God's choice.

At this juncture, David, in the wilderness of Paran, heard that Nabal, a rich flock-master of Maon, was shearing his sheep in Carmel. So he sent, and asked for a present as an acknowledgment of the kindness shown

by him, and the protection afforded by his band, to the flocks and servants of Nabal in the past. "Thy shepherds," said David, "which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were at Carmel" (ver. 7). Had David exaggerated the service that he and his band had rendered? What could the shepherds say? "The men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields; they were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep" (15, 16). Such services under ordinary circumstances called for a recompense, most would think; but above and beyond this, David, by his messengers, afforded the flock-master an opportunity of ministering to the Lord's anointed during his time of trial. That message sent to Nabal tested him in a double way. Would he requite kindness, and would he care for the king after God's own heart? What thought Nabal of David's message, and of the opportunity afforded him? His words are an index to his mind: "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?" (10, 11). Self pervades the answer; *my* bread, *my* water, *my* flesh,

*my* shearers. He only thought of that which he possessed. Like the fool in Luke xii., his desires went not out beyond himself and his immediate circle, forgetful how precarious was the tenure of that which he called his own. He was churlish; he was also foolish. A runaway servant he professed to think that David was; men whom I know not whence they be, was his description of David and his company. God's interests on earth at that time were nothing to Nabal. He thus lost his opportunity of taking God's side in his day, and *lost it for ever*.

Has Nabal had no successors? Has he no representatives on earth at this day? Was it so difficult to discover who David was? The right solution of that question would shed a flood of light on the importance of the opportunity to which he was so indifferent. In his own house there was one who knew who and what David was; Abigail, his wife, could have answered her husband's questions. Yet we know not that she had any special means of acquiring that knowledge beyond those possessed by Nabal. Probably she had never met David, as very likely Nabal and he were personally unacquainted with each other. Now, however, came Abigail's opportunity; would she use it? or would she, sheltering herself behind her lord, allow the precious moments to pass, and so be involved in the destruction which Nabal in his folly courted. She had but a short time to decide; procrastination for a day would have been fatal.

Advised by one of the young men of Nabal's reply to the messengers, and warned of the impending vengeance: "Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him" (17); Abigail had to act for herself, if David's anger was to be appeased. This she did, for we read, "Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses, and she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal" (18, 19).

How imminent was the danger, and Nabal quite unconscious of it! As Abigail rode on the ass, and came down by the covert of the hill, behold, David and his men came down against her on their errand of destruction. He and she now met in the valley, or defile. She had descended into it on the one side, and he and his men came down into it from the other. The two companies confronted each other. Then Abigail bowed herself as a suppliant at David's feet, beseeching his forgiveness, and deprecating his wrath. Personally innocent of Nabal's offence, she took her place as liable for the consequences of it (28), and cast herself on David's mercy. Nabal was a man of Belial (*i.e.*, a worthless fellow). As his name was, so was he; Nabal

(*i.e.*, a fool), was he, and folly was with him. Who, on the other hand, was David? She well knew, she could and did tell.

As Nabal's wife we may suppose, as we have said, that her opportunities of forming a correct judgment on this important question were not more favourable than those which Nabal had enjoyed. But what a difference between them. He asked (was it affected ignorance?) Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? Who David was, and what he was, was all plain to her; there was nothing mysterious about it. She knew that he fought the Lord's battles, and that no evil had been found in him all his days. What folly, then, to be against him, and to incur his righteous displeasure. And not less clear was she about his future. She was sure, 1st, that the Lord would build him a house; 2nd, that his soul would be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord his God, whilst the souls of his enemies his God would sling out as from the hollow of a sling; and 3rd, that he would rule by divine appointment over Israel. All this Nabal might have known equally with herself. A runaway servant he was in Nabal's eyes; one fighting the Lord's battles he was in Abigail's eyes. In this she was right. To refuse him help, then, was to take sides against God, and to court certain and unsparing vengeance at His hand. That she could not risk.

As yet, however, her estimate of David's future was the estimate of faith. He had no



children, so there was no present prospect of a sure house. He was still in frequent danger of his life from Saul, so humanly speaking, he might be cut off during Saul's occupancy of the throne; but Abigail had clear perceptions about him, and hence came to entreat his forgiveness. What a picture does this present to us, with David as the central figure, Nabal on the one side reviling him, and Abigail on the other desiring to be remembered by him in his coming day of power. "When the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid" (31). Reading it, one's thoughts run on to the history of the crucifixion, as related by Luke, and to the dying petition of the penitent thief. As to him, so to Abigail, the assurance of present acceptance was graciously and immediately made known, whilst the imminent danger to which Nabal and all his house had been exposed was also declared. To Nabal she returned, and found him holding a feast like a king, and drunken with wine. What a picture of a worldling, making merry and crying peace and safety when destruction is impending. What must Abigail have felt as she witnessed that? Could she have stayed quietly at home and joined in that feast? In what a strong light must Nabal's folly have appeared, as she looked on that revelry, and remembered what she had witnessed in the valley from which she had just returned. Here was Nabal, unconscious of the danger to which he had been exposed. There had she met

David and his company on their way to cut off every one of them. How thankful she must have been that she used her opportunity. How could she have rested in peace, till assured that all danger of death or of violence was averted?

Is this history but a record of the past? Has it not a voice for the present day? Is there no doom impending over the world? Is there no wrath to come? Would David have been unrighteous in punishing Nabal? Would not Abigail have made herself a partner in her husband's guilt, if, when informed of what he had done, she had remained quietly at home as one unconcerned about it? All will admit that such conduct would have manifested the grossest folly, and would have justly merited severe punishment. Does any one soberly think God can treat with indifference the world's rejection of His Son? Impossible. He may bear long with it, but not for ever. "Despisest thou," it has been asked, "the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. ii. 4, 5). Solemn considerations are these, put before His creatures by God Himself. No professing Christian would justify the world's crucifixion of God's Son. Has each one cleared himself of that guilt, by becoming in

truth and earnestness a believer on the Son of God?

We come now to the last acts in Nabal's history. Acquainted by Abigail on the morrow, when he was sober, of the danger which by her interposition had been averted, he was filled with fear, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. He had lost the opportunity of requiting David's kindness. Was there any regret for the past; any repentance for what he had done? There is not a trace of it. The opportunity now afforded him by his wife's tale of her interview with David, to judge his ways in the past was also neglected. How intensely foolish does he appear. He neither showed kindness to David when he had it in his power, nor did he repent of his follies, when the opportunity for repentance was afforded him. Can we wonder that at length God took up the matter with him? The Lord smote him, and he died. His period of probation was ended; his future was irrevocably fixed. Nabal might have been remembered as one who ministered to the Lord's anointed in the time of his persecutions; instead of which he stands out on the page of history as a churl, a man of Belial, and a fool.

But what of Abigail? Death separated her and Nabal. She then became David's wife, casting in her lot with him, whilst he was still persecuted by Saul. Were her convictions about David's future erroneous, or correct? Correct, indeed, they were, and she

witnessed that ; for when Nabal's body was slumbering in the tomb, she accompanied David as king over Judah to Hebron (2 Sam. ii. 2), whither seven years subsequently, all the elders of Israel repaired to anoint him king over Israel. A partaker of his sufferings, she witnessed the day of his exaltation and power.

The application of all this it is not difficult to discern. The Lord Jesus is still the rejected One ; so the opportunity to confess Him is yet offered to souls. All who cast in their lot to suffer for Him shall reign with Him (2 Tim. ii. 12) ; knowing, too, that now they are united to Him by the Spirit in the closest possible way, being members of His Body, and part also of that highly favoured company called His Bride. And when those who have rejected Him will be slumbering in the tomb, awaiting the resurrection unto judgment, they shall be with Him, rejoicing as they behold His greatness, His majesty, and His glory.





Hallelujah! who shall part  
 Christ's own Church from Christ's own heart  
 Sever from the Saviour's side,  
 Souls for whom the Saviour died?  
 Cast one precious jewel down  
 From Immanuel's blood-bought crown?

Hallelujah! shall the sword  
 Part us from our glorious Lord?  
 Trouble dire or dark disgrace  
 From His heart our names erase?  
 Famine, nakedness, or hate,  
 Us from Jesus separate?

Hallelujah! life nor death,  
 Powers above, nor powers beneath,  
 Satan's might, nor hell's dark gloom,  
 Things which are, nor things to come,  
 Men nor angels, e'er shall part  
 Christ's own Church from Christ's own heart.

*The Praise Book.*

