WRITINGS OF F W KRUMMACHER - VOLUME 1

by F.W. Krummacher

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by F.W. Krummacher (Volume 1), compiled for study and devotional reading.

99 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01.00.00. A GLANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GRACE
2. 01.00.01. Prefaces
3. 01.00.02. Contents & License
4. 01.1. A Mother's Love
5. 01.2. The Camp of Judah
6. 01.3. Issachar
7. 01.4. The Vision of The Night
8. 01.5. Spiritual Decline and Recovery
9. 01.6. The Dew of Israel
10. 01.7. The Saviour's Joy
11. 01.8. The Temptation of Christ
12. 01.9. Authors Bio
13. 02.00.1. ELIJAH THE TISHBITE
14. 02.00.3. Copyright Information
15. 02.00.4 Table of Contents
16. 02.01. Elijah's First Appearance
17. 02.02. Elijah At The Brook Cherith
18. 02.03. The Departure for Zarephath
19. 02.04. Raising The Widow's Son at Zarephath
20. 02.05. Elijah and Obadiah
21. 02.06. Deliverance from the Mouth of the Lion
22. 02.07. Elijah and the People at Mount Carmel
23. 02.08. The Decision at Mount Carmel
24. 02.09. The Prayer on Mount Carmel
25. 02.10. Flight Into the Wilderness
26. 02.11. Visit Under the Juniper Tree
27. 02.12. Arrival at Mount Horeb
28. 02.13. The Manifestation on Mount Horeb
29. 02.14. Renewed Mission
30. 02.15. The Hidden Church
31. 02.16. The Callings of Elisha
32. 02.17. Naboth's Vineyard
33. 02.18. Ahab's Repentance
34. 02.19. The Journey to Ekron
35. 02.20. The Preaching By Fire
36. 02.21. The Work-Day Evening
37. 02.22. The Passage Through Jordan
38. 02.23. The Great Request
39. 02.24. The Ascension

40. 02.25. The Parting
41. 02.26. The Legacy
42. 02.27. Growth In Grace
43. 02.28. The Writing Which Came to Jehoram from Elijah
44. 02.29. The Mount of Transfiguration
45. 02.30. The Holy Embassy
46. 02.31. The Shekinah
47. 02.32. None But Jesus
48. 03.00.1. ELISHA: A PROPHET FOR OUR TIMES
49. 03.00.2. Preface
50. 03.01. Elisha's Appearance: 2Ki_2:19-22
51. 03.02. The Character of Elisha's Mission
52. 03.03. His First Prophetic Appearance
53. 03.04. The Judgment at Bethel: 2Ki_2:23-25
54. 03.05. The Origin of the Mockery
55. 03.06. The Nature of the Mockery
56. 03.07. The Consequences of Mockery
57. 03.08. The Expedition against Moab: 2Ki_3:9-12
58. 03.09. The Embarrassment of the Kings
59. 03.10. The Kings Visit Elisha
60. 03.11. The Miraculous Relief: 2Ki_3:13-19
61. 03.12. Elisha's Address to the Kings
62. 03.13. The Minstrel
63. 03.14. The Prophet's Directions
64. 03.15. The Augmentation of the Oil: 2Ki_4:1-7
65. 03.16. A Poor Widow's Distress
66. 03.17. The Widow's Care of the Prophet
67. 03.18. The Widow's Miraculous Relief
68. 03.19. The Shunammite: 2Ki_4:8-37
69. 03.20. Lodging at Shunem
70. 03.21. The Grateful Guest
71. 03.22. The Dying Child
72. 03.23. Gehazi with Elisha's Staff
73. 03.24. The Raising from the Dead
74. 03.25. Death in the Pot: 2Ki_4:33-41
75. 03.26. The Dearth in the Land
76. 03.27. Death Familiar among the Heirs of Heaven
77. 03.28. The Lord's Hand not Shortened
78. 03.29. The Man from Baal-Shalisha: 2Ki_4:42-44
79. 03.30. The Man with the Loaves
80. 03.31. Elisha's Command
81. 03.32. The Confusion of Gehazi

82. 03.33. Naaman: 2Ki_5:1-2
83. 03.34. Naaman the Syrian
84. 03.35. The Little Israelitish Maiden
85. 03.36. The Little Maid from a Foreign Land: 2Ki_5:3
86. 03.37. Sold at Market
87. 03.38. The Disease
88. 03.39. The Journey to Samaria: 2Ki_5:4-7
89. 03.40. Naaman's Preparation for His Journey
90. 03.41. Naaman's Passport
91. 03.42. Naaman's Arrival in the Holy Land
92. 03.43. The Beggar: 2Ki_5:8-10
93. 03.44. The Intervention of Elisha
94. 03.45. The Journey to Jericho
95. 03.46. The Prophet's Directions
96. 03.47. The Way of Recovery: 2Ki_5:11-14
97. 03.48. Naaman's Displeasure
98. 03.49. The Servant's Protest
99. 03.50. The Cure: 2Ki_5:14-15

Chapter 1

01.00.00. A GLANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GRACE

A GLANCE

INTO THE KINGDOM OF GRACE by F. W. KRUMMACHER, D.D. translated from the German by, Rev. Maximilian Geneste, M.A.

Second Edition

LONDON:

James Nisbet and Co. Berners Street;

John Johnstone, Edinburgh; and W. Curry and Co. Dublin

1841

01.00.01. Prefaces

THE AUTHORS PREFACE

Sermons are a species of reading held in little estimation by the world. Among literary productions, by far the lowest place is assigned them, as a light and airy commodity by which knowledge cannot be promoted or extended; and an Authorship which is limited to Sermons, is regarded as of no value, and in the award of fame and merit is deemed but as dust in the balance. Collections of Sermons are nevertheless showered down upon us, and every successive season threatens a new flood, by which an inundation may at length be apprehended, not, however, of serious consequence; since, almost without exception, they descend with rapid haste into the deep and silent pit of oblivion, soon enough ■ alas, in few cases can it be said too soon ■ to find their grave, and terminate their ephemeral existence.

Under such circumstances, and amid the loud complaint of the reading community, made without intermission respecting the multitudes of religious compositions with which, like a swarm of locusts, they are visited and overwhelmed, the Author of the accompanying volume, which, moreover, makes its appearance in the despised form of Sermons, does not find himself under the least concern to justify its publication. To use the hackneyed pretense, and say, that he published it by " particular request," his conscience will not allow; and of the value of his productions, to say the truth, he has no very great opinion: at the same time, he would have it understood, that the well known tenets contained therein are to him beyond all worth, " better than gold and fine gold," and more precious than life itself.

The Author is perfectly sensible, that these Sermons little accord with the form and standard of the modern school, nor would they pass the ordeal of critical acumen. The sapient mother, Didactic Wisdom, if she should deign to look upon these productions, would see them, for the most part, so inartificial, so disconnected and irregular, that she could not possibly acknowledge them as her offspring, but would pronounce over them " Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin; " Expository Wisdom would with displeasure observe, in certain parts, the absence of the literal meaning; another school would complain of the want of good taste; while Critical Philosophy would find fault with the deficiency of sound reasoning.

The author hopes, by this self-condemnation, to propitiate those worthy gentlemen who sit in judgment, and he would give utterance to the wish, that they would admit, as an excuse for the publication of these discourses, that he both preached and committed them to writing, not for the wise men after the flesh, nor for the mighty, nor for the noble, of whom the apostle in one place speaks, and whose applause he must be content to forego; but for those whom man despiseth, but whom God hath chosen, for the sojourners in Mesech, and especially for the babes among them, to whom these sermons may perhaps convey a little honey from the slain lion; as it is written, "'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness."

As it respects the title of the publication, " A Glance into the Kingdom of Grace," it may be observed, that it is designed to point out the subject treated of, since the sermons refer, for the most part, to the daily experience and inward state of the children of grace in the way of salvation. That respecting Issachar would have been omitted in this collection, if the Author had been aware that it had already made its appearance in another place.

The Sacred Writings, his own heart, and the people who surround him, constitute together, the Volume of instruction to which the preacher of the gospel should especially direct his studies and inquiries, and from which he should borrow the materials of all his Discourses.

If, therefore, this publication should be recognized by the experienced as genuine gleanings from that living and inexhaustible Volume; and if, here and there, a hungry soul should receive from these crumbs any comfort and refreshment, then all the desires will be accomplished with which the Author, with great diffidence, sends them forth into the world.

THE AUTHOR.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

The name of Krummacher is now familiar to the English ear; and the satisfaction with which some of his works have already been received, might alone be deemed a sufficient apology for adding to their number: but there is another reason, of still greater force ■ the intrinsic merits of his writings are such as cannot fail to recommend them to the lovers of scriptural simplicity and truth.

It has been the endeavor of the Translator, in presenting the Author to the public in another garb, to produce, as far as possible, the same impression on the English mind, which the original work is calculated to make on the German.

He is fully sensible of the difficulty of translation, and conscious of the great loss which a writer must sustain in having his ideas transferred into a different language; but if, with the absence of his elegance and power of expression, the meaning of the Author has in any case not been conveyed, it must be attributed to the fault, not to the intention of the Translator.

This small volume comprises the whole of that to which Dr. Krummacher refers in his Preface, with the exception of one discourse, namely, " The Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness," which he states to be a short abridgment of a course of Sermons delivered to his people in the vale of Barmen.' That brief Treatise, as it may be termed, does not appear necessarily to form a part of his design as expressed in the title-page, and, from its nature and construction, it differs in various respects from the rest of the work.

Should this effort be made effectual, through the blessing of God, for the spiritual good of any of those to whom Dr. Krummacher can speak only through the medium of a translation, the highest wish and earnest desire of the translator, with regard to the publication, will be abundantly gratified.

THE TRANSLATOR.

West Cowes,

September, 1837.

NOTICE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The Translator has gladly availed himself of the opportunity afforded by the demand for a New Edition of this Work, carefully to revise the whole: he has in some instances endeavored to elucidate and otherwise improve the text. "The Temptation of Christ in the Wilderness," omitted in the former impression, but subsequently published by itself, is included in the present Volume. Some passages have been altered, in which a degree of speculation was indulged, the result of a luxuriant imagination, but which might not be deemed suitable for general readers in this country.

West Cowes,

December, 1837.

01.00.02. Contents & License

CONTENTS.

1. A Mother’s Love, or The Tender Compassion of Our God 2. The Camp of Judah 3. Issachar, or The Couching Between Two Burdens 4. The Vision of The Night 5. Spiritual Decline and Recovery 6. The Dew of Israel 7. The Saviour’s Joy

8. The Temptation of Christ in The Wilderness 9. Authors Bio.

License Copyright Status: This book is in the Public Domain.

License: Creative Commons 3.0 Unported (by-nc-sa) 2010 This book may be freely copied and distributed worldwide. This book may be freely downloaded from Internet Archive, in PDF or Text format: http://www.archive.org/advancedsearch.php

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. Malachi 3:16-18

01.1. A Mother's Love

Chapter 1 A MOTHER’S LOVE, OR THE TENDER COMPASSION OF OUR GOD

"But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands: thy walls are continually before me." - Isaiah 49:14-16

Truly, the Lord loveth the gates of Zion. Glorious things are spoken of thee, city of God. Behold a fruit tree near a fountain, from whence thousands of weary pilgrims in every age, have gathered golden fruits, and it flourishes, and blossoms, and is still richly laden. O let every troubled soul draw near, and partake of this heavenly manna.

Three things here demand our attention ■

1. The building of Zion.

2. The mournful complaint of the daughter of Zion, and 3. The assurance of God’s love to his afflicted children.

These shall be the subjects of our meditation.

1. THE BUILDING OF ZION

Go round about Zion, mark well her bulwarks, and consider the towers thereof. Zion is the city of the living God, ■ the church, the tabernacle, or building of which St. Peter speaks, when he addresses those that are born of water and of the Holy Ghost, and says. " Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house." (1 Peter 2:5) Such is a full and comprehensive representation of the church of God. Do you inquire respecting the Great Master Builder? The Creator of all things is the founder of the church. Its builder and maker is God. Before the world was called into being, its design was minutely portrayed, in all its beautiful proportions, in the counsels of the Eternal. The height, and breadth, and length of God’s building were accurately defined; the period within which it should be perfected was determined; the stones were all numbered, and the places specified whence they should be obtained. Nearly six thousand years have elapsed since God begun the spiritual building, and Yet it is still in progress, and in perfect accordance with the original design. It is the work of God alone. We are only instruments which he employs; all the glory is his. He shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory. (Zechariah 6:12-13) He is jealous for the honour of his name. Do you ask respecting the foundation of the church? St. Paul has furnished us with the answer: " Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11) The incarnate God is the foundation. If trust be reposed in any other Saviour than " the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" (John 1:29) if the surety-ship of blood be wanting, it is " no house of the Lord." The true church is based upon Christ; but not upon him with whom the world can find no fault; nor upon him whom an infidel and atheistic philosophy can tolerate; but it rests upon that crucified

Saviour who is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24) And what is the building itself? It consists of stones, yea, of living stones. (1 Peter 2:5) Stones, indeed, are we all by nature, gravitating earthwards, cleaving to the dust, hard, cold, lifeless. How many of you have sat for years, unmoved alike by tenderness or wrath! The rain and dew have fallen from heaven; the sun has shone in his brightness; the awful storm of thunder and lightning has passed over you; and yet you remain unfeeling, obdurate, unchanged. Is not this like the stone, like the rock of flint? But, thanks be unto God, there is one who can, of these stones, raise up children unto Abraham. (Matthew 3:9)

It is even these hard and unyielding materials that God has selected for the building of the spiritual temple, that the greatness of his power may be made manifest. He chose not the angels and the heavenly host; He chose not the legions of devils, and the fallen morning stars; but the spiritually dead, miserable, and helpless children of Adam; these are the quarry from whence he collects the stones, with which to raise the walls of Zion. And as the building is the Lord’s, so is the separation of the stones from the quarry. His servants, the ministers of the Gospel, have power to loosen no stone; for he speaks the word by their mouth; he directs the stroke where it shall fall. " My word," saith the Lord, " is as the hammer, and as the fire which breaketh in pieces the rocks."

God’s methods in effecting this great work are not uniform, but various. Some are loosened gradually and gently, after long preparation, as Mary, Lazarus, and Martha. Others are forcibly severed; then is the work more speedy, and also more perceptible, as Peter, and Nicodemus. Others are rent as by a flash of lightning, like Paul on his way to Damascus, or the jailer at Philippi: there is a clap of thunder, and at once the stone is set free. But when may it be said that the stone is loosened? It is at that moment, my brethren, when the man, by the Spirit of God becomes conscious that he is a miserable sinner, utterly lost, and is led to repentance. Then is he separated from the quarry. God has taken him thence, and he is altogether changed; differing from the stones which remain in the quarry, he has become a living stone, and is awakened to recollection and calling upon God. He is now formed and polished by the hand of the builder, and laid upon the wall of the spiritual temple, being united to Christ the foundation, by a living faith, by a faith of the operation of God. (Colossians 2:12)

If we examine the building more narrowly, we shall discover a remarkable similarity in the living stones of which it is composed. Collected from the various nations of the earth both savage and cultivated, and diverse from each other in kind and quality, as soon as they occupy the place assigned them in the spiritual temple, all diversity ceases, and they severally form a constituent part of that magnificent edifice, which is distinguished for uniformity of execution no less than unity of design, and in the harmony and beauty of whose several parts, the glory of the Lord is specially made manifest. They are all sprinkled with the same blood, all renewed by the same Spirit: and though to themselves they appear utterly unworthy, they are, in the eyes of God, pure as the lily, and whiter than the snow. They are a lowly, contrite people, sojourners in Mesheck, (Psalms 120:5) pilgrims of God, who have here no continuing city, but seek one that is to come. (Hebrews 13:14) In the world they have tribulation, but in Christ they have peace: (John 16:33) they long and "wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of their body," (Romans 8:23.) and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. They have " one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all. (Ephesians 4:5) Herein is the unity of the true church.

Jerusalem is a city that is at unity in itself. (Psalms 122:3; Psalms 133:1)

One in spiritual life; the gifts and graces of the members of Christ are manifold and diversified. "Behold," saith the Lord, to his church, " I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires; and I will make thy windows of agate, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." (Isaiah 54:11) They are all precious stones; but one, in whom hope predominates, may be compared to an emerald; a second is distinguished for love; he is a ruby: in a third we are struck by the prevalence of a child-like simplicity and humility; he is a sapphire; a fourth is a transparent crystal, shining in wisdom and knowledge. One is contemplative and intellectual; another active and laborious. One is a babe, another a young man, a third is a father in Christ. Various as are the means by which they are brought nigh to God, yet they are all one in Christ Jesus. And "all this worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:1-13.) One Spirit works in all, and, as He wills, Gives varied gifts on either hand; But when each stone its place allotted fills. The temple shall completed stand;

Glorious amidst the city of our God!

There shine those gems of many a hue.

Thus shall his church appear ■ his saints' abode. Who seemed so mean to mortal view.

2. THE MOURNFUL COMPLAINT OF THE DAUGHTER OF ZION The Lord loveth the gates of Zion. But how deeply and how tenderly he loves her, she appears not to know; or why does she utter this mournful complaint, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." O Zion, weep rather for thyself. If thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God.

Visitations of calamity or of judgment may indeed he sent, under which nothing would be more appropriate than such a complaint. When, at the time of Noah, the whole world stood in hostile array against the Lord and against his anointed, and all, with the exception of a single family, were overwhelmed in one common and universal destruction; or when, both in Israel and Judah, the seed of Abraham revolted from Jehovah, and the knees of his elect people bowed before the altars of Moloch and of Baal; or when the haughty king of Babylon trampled with, the iron shoe of war the ruined fragments of Salem's towers, and the abomination of desolation was set up by Antiochus, on the altar of the Lord, and the holy book of God was torn by profane hands, and cast into the flames; or when, in later days, papal darkness brooded over the church, and obscured the light of heaven; or when, yet darker still, a godless illuminator dared to mock, as " the crucified," the Lord of lords ■ ah! "who then would chide the daughter of Zion because she hung her harp upon the willows, and clothed herself in mourning as a widow, and gave utterance to that melancholy cry, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me!" And what is thy state in these our days, thou daughter of Israel? Thou standest upon thy watch-tower, and lookest round upon thy palaces, and behold they are rich and glorious. On all sides thou hearest again the loud acclamations of Hosannah, Hosannah to Him that Cometh in the name of the Lord. Again, there is a witness and a testimony awakened in the land, where there was silence and sorrow ■ the witness of Him whom thy soul loveth. The blood-red banner of the cross is again unfurled; and

showers of blessings descend from the Lord. Take then thy harp from the bough of the willow and utter a song of praise to the Lord, and of defiance to his enemies. But should any one inquire of thee, " What of the night?" then mayest thou answer, not, indeed, without tears, " The morning Cometh, and also the night; if ye will inquire, inquire ye, return, come." Thou regardest thyself still as vile, even as the worm Jacob, and sittest solitary, as a lonely cottage in a vineyard. Thou seest that in a thousand places the ways of Zion mourn, and all her ways are desolate, and her priests sigh and her virgins are afflicted. Thou castest thine eyes upon the countless host of hirelings who continually cause the people to err, and lead them through Golgotha to everlasting destruction. Thou beholdest the millions of wandering sheep which hear not the voice of the good Shepherd, and perish, eternally perish, and no man layeth it to heart. At the contemplation of this darkness around thee, thy heart is well nigh broken, and the bitter cry bursts from thee again, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." But if Zion doth not collectively thus complain, yet do I well know that in the hearts of many of the individual citizens of Zion, this lamentation is not silenced. I hearken to you, and hear, O children of God; and O! on every side of me, the heavy sigh escapes from many a heart, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

There sits a poor weeping penitent, and he smites upon his breast and cries, " God be merciful to me, a sinner! " As yet he knows not how to find the arms and heart of the Saviour, and he thinks " the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.’

Yonder, behold a warrior in the hard conflict against sin and the devil, and as he deals his blows around him, he cannot overcome that creeping serpent, whose heads, when wounded, are continually renewed; and at length the poor soldier of the cross sinks upon the earth, and exclaims, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! "

Here lies a poor soul in the darkness of heavy temptation, agitated and oppressed with fearful doubts, alarming forebodings, and thoughts which cause all his bones to tremble. He doubts respecting his state, he doubts respecting Christ and his love, and the cry impetuously bursts from his heart, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

There languishes another, who has now, for a long long time, been in the fire of outward tribulation, and the Lord comes not down to deliver him, and his enemies rejoice over him and say, " Where is now thy God? " and alas! his God does not reveal himself. The footsteps of the Lord are in the great waters, and his head is veiled in the clouds, so that even the friends of this troubled soul begin to say, " If thou wert righteous, God would not thus deal with thee; " and the poor sufferer is dismayed, and cries out in the anguish of his soul, " The Lord hath forsaken me." And whatever other causes may be assigned, is it not true, beloved heirs of the kingdom, that the melancholy plaint is not unfrequently heard among us, " The Lord hath forgotten me? " From many a heart does it arise, in many a chamber does it become vocal, and on the beds of multitudes of the children of Zion is it uttered, with bitter cries and tears, in the night, when the world is still, and the inhabitants thereof are at rest.

Gather yourselves together, then, ye godly troubled souls, for I speak not to those who have the sorrow of the world; gather yourselves together. Think not that I mean to rebuke you for your unbelief. No! That belongs not to me: for the Lord himself doth not rebuke you. Would you then comfort us? No beloved, not I; for how would that relieve you? But I would direct you to One who is both able and willing to comfort you. Behold! He is none other than the Lord God himself. He has

heard your cry; he knows your sorrows; and is come down to deliver you. The bowels of his mercy yearn over you, his weeping children. Behold! Behold him! See the light of his countenance lifted up upon you; the outstretched arms of a merciful God and loving Father. He has a word to say to you; fear not. It is a word by which the darkness of your souls shall at once be converted into the brightness of the day.

3. THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’s LOVE TO HIS AFFLICTED CHILDREN.

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me."

O, brethren, what grace, what comfort is here! Lay these words near your heart: let not one be lost, and say whether they are not full of comfort! Is it not a great and distinguished privilege to be permitted to fall down before the Almighty in trembling reverence, and to call him our God? And it is yet a greater blessedness to have boldness of access, through Christ, and to be enabled to cry to him in the spirit of adoption, " Abba, Father." And mark this well. It is as if God would encourage us to approach him with the confidence which we repose in a mother, and freely, and openly, without any fear or reserve, to communicate our inmost thoughts and feelings to himself. A mother’s love is therefore set before us, and we are assured that it is but a faint and imperfect emblem of the love of God.

Think, brethren, of the tender care and anxious solicitude of a mother! In whose arms does an infant love to rest! In whose heart is the helpless babe enshrined! By whose watchful care is his every want supplied! Is it not a mother’s? Who has borne, and carried, and nourished, and fed you? Is it not a mother? Who, my dear little ones, who is it that provides for you, and clothes you? Who corrects you, when needful, and herself suffers more, at such times, than the corrected child? Who comforts you, and gently lays you to rest?! is it not a mother? What more dost thou desire, thou happy child? Softly lay thy head on the bosom of thy mother, and repose in peace.

And, is it by a mother’s love that the Lord describes his own! It is my brethren; and it is to you he speaks, and his voice is to the children of men. Then, then, I have enough. What more do I need to hear? It is enough. ■ No! my beloved. God has yet more to say to you. He would tell you further how it is that he loveth you.

" Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? " Such is the inquiry which the Lord makes. And mark the rising force of the words, which is noticed by many ancient commentators. Can a woman forget ■ can she who is per-eminently endowed with feeling and affection ■ can she forget her child? The child may be ungrateful and rebellious, but will she, on that account, forget him, withdraw from him her love, and banish him from her heart! Never! never ■ I confidently appeal to you who are mothers.

But, admitting that she may forget her grown-up son, and far distant daughter, will she therefore forget her infant, her tender, helpless, sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? O no! A tiger may forget her young, but not a tender mother. But to suppose possible that which we acknowledge to be an impossibility ■ a mother may forget her little child: does it then, of necessity, follow, that she will not have compassion on the son of her womb? that she can, without pain, see him languish, and pine away, and die? Ah, no! A mother’s eyes that had

never wept, would at such a sight become a fountain of tears. And where is the mother that would not, from the heart, cry out, " Alas I my poor, poor child! would that I could suffer for thee, and ease thee of thy pain! "

When, therefore, the Lord inquires, " Can a mother forget her sucking child " are not all of you, who are mothers, ready with the answer? and do you not reply, with one voice, " No, no! it cannot be! " And so, saith the Lord, will I not forget you, my beloved children. Thus he loveth you with the tenderness of the most tender mother.

But, yet more. Here is not only a mother's tenderness, but a love beyond that of a mother. For the Lord does not merely say, I will not forget thee: but he says, "yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." If that which appears impossible, should indeed take place ■ a mother may forget her sucking child ■ yet will not I, the unchangeable, the eternal God, yet will not I forget thee. This is strong language. Here is opened before us the deep abyss of love, which the eye of man can never penetrate. And as we have no means to fathom it, so we can form no conception, much less can we give any adequate expression thereof.

O daughter of Zion, canst thou now complain, " the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me?" Ah! such a cry is not right, it is sin, it is blasphemy. Away with such unworthy complaint. Down in the dust and pray''. And how does the Lord close these words of heavenly comfort? " Behold I have graven thee on the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." How precious this assurance to Zion at large, as well as to each individual believer! As an architect who is about to build a city, first lays down the outline, and marks out the spaces required for houses, streets, squares, and palaces, so also hath the Lord delineated his whole plan of the spiritual Zion: and it is upon the palms of his hands that he hath graven it. There, in his eternal purpose, doth it stand, finished and adorned in all its splendor: and who can hinder Him from perfecting his great and mighty design? Though the war-cry of the Canaanite and Samaritan may be, " Down with it! Down with it! even to the ground!" yet will the flag of Zion ever wave on its towers of glory. For the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion. Her walls are continually before him. With his favour doth he compass her as with a shield. And as Zion is herself graven upon the palms of His hands, so are each of the citizens thereof. O that every one of you could realize this for yourselves. You are graven there, not in the form which you now bear, not in the body of sin and death which still cleaves to you, (Romans 7:24) but in the similitude of that perfect body in which you shall hereafter be raised in power. (1 Corinthians 15:43) And whilst you are here suffering in the church militant, and groan, being burdened, (2 Corinthians 5:4). God beholds you already invested with the robes of righteousness, and bearing on high the palms of triumph, and shining in the spotless purity and surpassing brightness of eternal glory. (Revelation 7:9) Such as you stand engraven upon his hands, such you shall assuredly be before the throne of the Majesty on high. Nor is there a moment in which, wherever you are, his eyes are not upon you. Know, thou daughter of Zion, that thou art ever before him.

Shouldst thou retire into solitude to weep ■ shouldst thou water thy couch with thy tears ■ shouldst thou lie, with Elijah, under the lonely juniper tree ■ or withdraw into the deepest shades of the dark and dreary forest, the tender heart of God is near thee, his watchful eye of love is over thee, and his right hand, though unseen, upholds and strengthens thee. In whatever state or circumstances thou mayest be, as often as thou sayest, " The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord

hath forgotten me," thou speakest not aright, thou doest thyself much wrong, God knoweth. Ah! brother, if thine eyes were but once opened, as were the eyes of the servant of the prophet, to see the angels of God that encamp around thee, thou wouldat indeed be astonished.

Away then with needless care! Who should be careful that knows the tender love of God! He forgetteth not his child, his little one, his helpless babe. O no. The child of God may take this comfortable assurance home to his heart. But are we his children? You are, brethren, if you can say, that with weeping hearts you seek his grace: that you inwardly delight in the fruit of his Cross; that, with a contrite spirit, you desire nothing more earnestly than to be washed in the blood of Jesus. Then are you the children of God: and, though you are not yet able to rejoice in the full assurance of your adoption into the family of heaven, and as yet are not conscious of being the objects" of the tender love of your God; nevertheless, believe in that love. The time for sensible experience is not far distant. God would delight to lead us in a smoother and more pleasant path than he is ordinarily wont to lead us, did not our salvation demand it otherwise.

But, look well to it, dear brethren, each for himself, that you do not groundlessly trust in the love and mercy of our God. It is to Zion only that God speaks in my text. And it is not fasting and prayer, it is not works and deservings, which bring us within the bonds of this covenant of grace and love; it is a poor, broken, and contrite heart, a troubled spirit, and a soul sighing and looking to the Cross of Jesus. The " Lord, remember me," of the thief upon the cross ■ the "God be merciful to me a sinner," which bursts from the heart of the penitent, as, led by the Spirit, he bends in lowly reverence before the Lamb of God offered in sacrifice ■ such a prayer alone rends the heavens, such a prayer finds its way, through our Advocate, to the heart of the Father; it is the key of the sanctuary. that God may give it to you all for Jesus Christ’s sake.

Amen.

01.2. The Camp of Judah

Chapter 2 THE CAMP OF JUDAH.

’ And on the east side, toward the rising of the sun, shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, shall be captain of the children of Judah." - Numbers 2:3. This chapter is entitled the order of the tribes in their tents. It informs us how they encamped on their way to Canaan; but it has also a further signification. For this people was a type of the spiritual Israel, and all God’s dealings with them had a reference to greater things to come. All were allegorical prophetic, significant ■ shadows of those things of which the substance is to be found in the kingdom of Christ. This remark applies not only to the whole multitude collectively, but, individually, to the tribes of which it was composed. Thus, in the words before us, we are taught the manner in which the people of God are encamped in the present day.

Let us draw near, that we may behold more clearly this lovely sight. We will observe, 1. The tribe of Judah.

2. His camp.

3. The position of his camp.

4. His standard.

5. His army.

6. His captain. And may the Spirit of the Lord direct our meditations aright.

1. THE TRIBE OF JUDAH.

It is generally understood that the tribe of Judah was a representation of the New Testament Church, which is not unfrequently designated by the term Judah. Thus it is said by the Prophet Joel, " Judah shall dwell for ever." (Joel 3:20) And Zechariah foretells that " the Lord shall inherit Judah, his portion in the holy land." (Zechariah 2:12) A similar allusion is contained in the blessing of Jacob, " Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." (Genesis 49:8) And indeed, Judah possesses every qualification requisite to set forth the reality of the spiritual church. Was Judah the most distinguished tribe which gave to all Israel a race of kings? Behold here is an elect people, a people who are all kings and priests, and whose sceptre shall govern all the inhabitants of the earth. (Revelation 2:6) Was Judah the tribe in which the second Adam was born? Behold, here is the woman clothed with the Sun, who by the power of the Spirit, and the witness of the word, bringeth forth a man-child, even Christ, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron. (Revelation 12:1-5) Was Judah the tribe which dwelt on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, and, bore in its bosom the sanctuary of God! Behold, here are the royal priesthood, the citizens of the heavenly Zion, themselves the habitation of God by the Spirit. The holy fire is preserved among them, and the glory of the Lord filleth the house. This then is the true Judah. The name Judah signifies

praise. Now, said his mother at his birth, will I praise the Lord, and thence his name. So also is the spiritual Judah appointed and ordained for the praises of Him, who hath called him out of darkness into his marvellous light. Even when silent, there ascends from his tabernacles the sacrifice of praise. For what was once the state of those who are now so highly honoured? Were they not as firebrands snatched from the burning, and though now a holy nation, and peculiar people, were they not once without God and without Christ in the world? The golden harps which they bear in their hands, were placed there by the God of Jacob, and though fellow heirs with the holy angels, and inheritors of the glory that shall be revealed, their desert was the misery and despair of the devil and his angels, in the blackness of darkness for ever.

Well may this people be called Judah, a praise to the Lord, for it is a living monument of the power and grace of Christ, more glorious than the fabric of the world, a people that he hath formed for himself, they shall show forth his praise. (Isaiah 43:21.) He esteems them as his peculiar treasure. They are a " crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God." (Isaiah 42:3.) " They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his son that serveth him." (Malachi 3:17) Their names are borne on the breast-plate of the Great High Priest into the Holy of holies, and when at length the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and every eye shall see him, he shall come attended by this people, they shall encircle him as a guard of honour, they shall sit on his throne, and with him judge the world. They are made for the praise of the glory of his grace, and thence they are termed Judah, that is, praise. Such are the people of whom we speak. But let it be observed, that we have not here to do with that Judah who dwelt at peace among the hills of Zion, and on the shores of the Jordan, and sat beneath his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid; but our text refers to that Judah, who, abroad upon his march, amid the sound of trumpet and the clang of war, pitched his camp in the barren wilderness, and thought of battle and of strife. And the spiritual Judah in this world has much more resemblance to a people so circumstanced, than to such as were in the full enjoyment of peace within the borders of the promised land. For they are enlisted under the banner of the cross, nor shall their warfare be accomplished till they at length attain the crown. (Revelation 2:10)

Truly they have more adversaries than Midian and Amalek. Many are the principalities and powers which stand opposed to them in hostile array. They have enemies in the air, (Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 6:12.) and on the earth; (Ephesians 5:14.) enemies in the house, (Matthew 10:36.) in the heart, (Mark 7:21-23.) and in the members; (James 4:1) enemies in the tumult of the world, (Mark 10:17-25; Acts 4:25-30.) and in the solitary chamber; (Matthew 4:1.) and on all sides they are beset with ambuscades and snares, and hidden mines. Thus, therefore, of necessity, must they ever stand ready armed. (Psalms 57:6; Proverbs 29:5.) The Judah of former days was divided into several companies, each of which had its peculiar equipments. And it is the same in spiritual things. As there is a diversity in form and outward circumstance, in complexion and character, and spiritual experience, so is there a difference in the weapons which they wield. The defence of some are tears, as it is with a child, who, on the appearance of danger, runs weeping to his mother. This is a band of combatants, who, when they are weak, then are they strong, and so one victory is followed by another. Others protect themselves after the manner of a virgin, with holy shame-facedness and modesty. Scarcely is the temptation presented, when the heart starts back with trembling apprehension; " How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

(Genesis 39:9.) and Joseph is rescued. A third class is skilled in the Word of God. " It is written," is their sword and shield under every assault; and then, " Get thee hence, Satan, for thou savourest not of the things that be of God." (Matthew 9:10.) With sighs and cries to God do others prevail, as Moses, in the conflict with Amalek, when Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands towards heaven, and Amalek and his people were discomfited with the edge of the sword. (Exodus 17:12.) Or the cross is lifted up on high, and one look is directed to the bleeding victim hanging on the tree, and the storm in the members is hushed, and Satan launches his weapons in vain. The spiritual combatants are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. They put on the whole armour of God, that they may he able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For they wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore they take unto them the whole armour of God, that they may he able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. They stand, therefore, having their loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith they are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And they take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance (Ephesians 6:10-18.) The Lord himself is their rock and then fortress, and their deliverer; their God, their strength, in whom they "will trust; their buckler and the horn of their salvation, and their high tower. (Psalms 18:2.) Relying on the thousand promises which are graven on the Rock of ages, they know and are fully assured that no enemy can do them harm. Wherever they encounter the adversary, they resist him with firmness, and deride his power, and they rejoice in the fulfillment of the promises of God, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. (2Co 1::20.) As the weapons are various which are used against the flesh and the devil, so are those also which are opposed to scorners and blasphemers. In the camp of Judah one fights with the transfixing arrows of meekness and love, blessing him that curses, and healing coals of fire upon his head. To another is given a holy conversation and heavenly example, to stay the tongue of slander. A third ensures success by a simplicity and gentleness which confounds and perplexes the enemy. And thus, by such-like weapons, taken from the spiritual armory, we prevail; though we walk after the flesh, we do not war after the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations and every ’’ high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5.) Nor is there a sword, or shield, or spear, or other instrument of war, found in the camp of Judah, which is not furnished by Him who is given for a leader and commander to the people, the Captain of the Lord’s host, the Captain of our salvation. (Isaiah 55:4; Joshua 5:15; Hebrews 2:10.) 2. THE CAMP OF JUDAH.

"On the east side, toward the rising of the sun, shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies." Behold, then, this people in their camp. The Lord of Hosts is with them! the God of Jacob is their refuge. (Psalms 46:7.) And underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before them, and shall say. Destroy them. (Deuteronomy 33:27.) But was it always so? Did the spiritual Judah, at all times, dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty! (Psalms 91:1.) No, brethren. A time was when they were without; {1 Corinthians 5:13.) and though exposed to dangers and destitute of help, they thought that they were safe. In fancied power, and imaginary goodness, they boasted of their state. But now the hand of grace has subdued their haughty spirit, and bowed to the earth

their crown of pride. Now they lie in the dust, weak, and poor, and destitute, and say, " In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." (Isaiah 45:24.) They encamp; they march; they fight; they conquer. Poor in spirit, and ever deeply sensible of their own unworthiness, they cast themselves at the feet of Jesus. And should any one of them attempt to quit the camp of Judah, to lift up or exalt himself he hears the voice of Jesus, calling him to return, and his former position is resumed. (Isaiah 30:21; John 12:23.)

Down, therefore, to these depths must you all come who trust in a righteousness of your own, and boast in a crown which your own hands have formed, (Jeremiah 9:24; 1 Corinthians 1:31.) There are no such vain confidences m Judah. They do, indeed, glory; but it is in the Lord they glory. (2 Corinthians 10:17.) Their crown is the crown of thorns, which encircled the brow of their King in the common hall of Pilate. (Matthew 27:27.) Their robe of righteousness is the garment dyed with blood, which their Lord was content to wear for their salvation. (Isaiah 63:1.) And ye who weary yourselves in the pursuit of human merit, that you may be your own saviors, and seek, by good works, to atone for your past transgressions; O come down from your heights, and take your station with the princely but lowly Judah. For Judah casts his crown upon the ground, the crown of life which the Saviour gives him; he lays his forehead on the footstool of the throne of grace, land is accepted in the Beloved. (Revelation 4:4-10; Ephesians 1:6.) The camp of Judah is pitched. It is not pleasing to the Lord that this people should consume their time in vain and fruitless labours. It is his will that they should rest in the enjoyment of the blessings which were purchased by the agony and bloody sweat, by the cross and passion of the Saviour. The feast is prepared for them; the time is come; all things are ready; nothing is required but to partake of the bounties so amply provided. (Matthew 22:4.)

Happy then is our state in the camp of God. We may rest in peace, for thou. Lord, only causest us to dwell in safety. Do we hear from afar the rushing of the storm? We learn to rejoice more in the serenity which pervades the camp of Judah. Do we hear, without, the war-cry of the enemy? Our souls are thus taught to delight in the voice of peace, (Ephesians 2:13-15.) which proceeds from the cross of Jesus, (Hebrews 12:24.). Do we hear at a distance the raging of hell? We compare it with the quiet of our own habitations, and give praise to God. Are we roused in our contemplation of future things by the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, summoning the world to judgment? We hear it with joy, for the more dreadful the things that must be hereafter, the sweeter our feeling of security in the knowledge of reconciliation. For, whoever has prostrated himself on the ground with Jesus in Gethsemane, and with the worm has become a worm, shall certainly also partake with him of this rich and abiding portion. But how is Judah encamped? In the form described by the wave-offering, namely, the form of the cross (See Numbers 8:11. marginal reading.) A most significant emblem! For the people of God are saved by the cross. They cling to the cross of the Redeemer, as to the plank which can rescue them from shipwreck. They rest upon the cross as the alone foundation of their spiritual life, of their hopes, their joys, and prospects. And whosoever is without the cross can claim no place in the camp of Judah. But where are the resting places of this favored people They dwell in a camp. In camps there are no fixed habitations, but only tabernacles and tents, which are speedily and without difficulty pitched and taken down. And it is well that it is so, for the children of Judah must always hold themselves in readiness to march. They are but wanderers and sojourners in the world. The feeling that they are such, should ever pervade their soul, and direct and control their plans and operations. Theirs is

the most happy condition upon earth. Occupying for a season a temporary habitation, with hearts set free from earthly entanglements, they confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and declare plainly that they seek a better country, that is, a heavenly. (Hebrews 11:13-16.) Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city. (1 Corinthians 7:29-31.) And thus those that have wives are as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away. And they know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in them. (Romans 8:18.) And though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning. (Psalms 30:5.) Here they have no continuing city, but they seek one to come. (Hebrews 13:14.)

0, how happy are they who have learnt, as travellers, to press onward to their much loved home, only seeking shelter for the night under a transient covert by the way! This is acquired only in the school of Christ. And as external objects affect so little the follower of Jesus, (for he looks not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal. So is it not to be expressed how firm is the hold which the anchor of his hope takes within the veil. One only knows, He who will shortly conduct His people to their rest, to the haven where they would be. 0, happy art thou, Judah in thy tents, and in thy dwellings by the way!

3. THE POSITION OF THE CAMP OF JUDAH.

Judah pitched "on the east side toward the rising of the sun." There is something animating and joyous in this description ■ on the east side, toward the rising sun ■ the evening behind them, the morning full in view. And observe, that from the child upwards to the gray-headed, all in Judah look to the east, to the sunrising. Where the Rose of Sharon blooms, where the Root of David sends forth its shoots out of a dry and thirsty ground, and the chief of the host of stars arises in splendor over the night, thither do they direct their looks ■ their thoughts.

Now the hill of Bethlehem is tipped before them from afar with glowing light, and they hear, with transported soul, the song of the angels. Now they stand upon the shore, and rejoice in Him, to whom the wind and the waves yield a ready obedience. At one time, they build a tabernacle with Peter on the mountain of the transfiguration, and dream dreams, and see visions of glorious things which shall be hereafter. At another time, they visit Jesus in the lowly cabin of the carpenter, their brother, in the form of a servant, and they adore His condescension in becoming so closely related to them, and exclaim with tears, " Brother! my Brother!" And now they enter into the darkness of Gethsemane, and with trembling reverence eagerly catch the bloody sweat which drops from the forehead of their Lord and Saviour, and the wounds of their souls begin to feel its healing power. Then the mount of the crucifixion arises before the view. The soul expands its wings, and on the cross of the dying penitent, adopts his prayer, " Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and draws upon itself the same blessing, "Verily, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:42; Luke 23:48.) Behold, the stone is rolled back from the sepulcher in the garden of Joseph! Praise, praise the Lord. The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed. He hath arisen victorious over death and the grave. Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. And now the glories of the rising morn are shed on the heights of Olivet. The soul mounts

upwards. She sees heaven opened, and God is gone up with a shout; the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises, sing praises unto our king, sing praises. (Psalms 47:5-6.) She breathes the air of paradise. She spreads abroad her wings, and would fain ascend with the bridegroom to the chamber where the marriage feast is prepared, and would leave for ever the earth and earthly things.

Thus, my brethren, doth Judah fix his gaze upon the opening glories of the morning. Thus is he encamped towards the east. Soon will the Sun of Righteousness arise as a bridegroom out of his chamber with healing in his wings. Already on every side, among Christians, the heathen, and the Jews, has the harbinger of day announced His near approach. Already the dawn appears and the eastern heavens are tinged with red, and the vapors which foretell the coming day, the mists of uproar and confusion which arise from the camp of the enemy, are dispersed as with the breath of a whirlwind.

He will come. The day-star from on high will visit us. The bride longs for his appearing! " Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." He will come. ■ The prince of the kings of the earth in the clouds of heaven, and will soon bring to an end the rage of His embittered enemies, and will establish the mountain of the Lord’s house in the top of the mountains, and exalt it above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. (Isaiah 2:2; Isaiah 2:5) house of Jacob, come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord. For our camp is pitched on the east side toward the rising of the sun. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. We already inhale the air of the morning, hoping, believing, looking upwards.

Behold then, on the east side, toward the rising sun, is Judah encamped. Thither tends his soul, and as he gazes with longing and intense delight, his eyes fill with tears, they fail with looking upward, and oppressed with the exceeding weight of glory, he sighs for the time when mortality shall be swallowed up of life.

Walk about Zion, and go round about her, tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, all look toward the east. (Psalms 48:12-13.) Glorious as is the dwelling-place of the Lord among men, it bears no comparison to that which shall be hereafter. If there was a glory, in the earthly temple, when the brightness of the Messiah was concealed by the veil of mortality, will it not be more strikingly made manifest in the world to come? And may not a further accomplishment of the promise be yet anticipated? " For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill the house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:6-7.) " The glory of the latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:9.) The great Melchizedec, the king of Salem, the king of peace shall reign there. For there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth shall pass away. And the holy city, the new Jerusalem, shall come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And a great voice out of heaven shall say. Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things will have passed away, and, behold, he that sitteth upon the throne will make all things new. And he said unto me, write, for these words are

true and faithful. (Revelation 21:1-5.) The pilgrim looks, therefore, towards the rising of the sun. He waits for the morning. To behold this is his desire in this dark and desolate world. He longs for his peaceful home, among the dwellings of the blessed. He thinks upon the morning of the eternal sabbath, and cries with David, "as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God r'(Psalms 42:1.)

Some in the camp of Judah are children of sorrow. They are encompassed by doubts, and sit in darkness, yet their window is ever open towards the east, hoping that the morning will quickly appear, that morning whose brightness and splendor no night can obscure. Others, beset by a thousand obstacles, would never know another happy hour, did they not perceive with the eye of expectation, through the confused imagery around them, the dawning of that day of which the poet speaks. As dreams shall seem the pilgrim's fears;

Great day; when thy bright morn appears.

Others, whilst bowed down with grief they follow the remains of a beloved one to the grave, though weeping, may rejoice for their eye, rests upon the dawning of that morning which will unite all the saints in one indissoluble bond of union.

Yes; go to the chambers of the afflicted children of God; visit their bed of suffering; see the brother of Job, the sister of Lazarus, and you may well ask, how they are capable of sustaining their calamities, and whence are derived the peace and serenity which beam in their eyes. But know, that to the upright their ariseth a light in the darkness, there shineth over them from afar the effulgence of a morning, such as the world never saw; an eternal Sabbath, a blessed jubilee, with thousand crowns and thousand glories; and by faith they behold Jesus himself, the Light of the world, the source of their present and everlasting joy. They are encamped on the east side, toward the rising of the sun. And it is as though they already heard the cheerful notes of the herald of the day, and as though the morning breeze wafted its freshness through their window, and the early dawn gladdened their chambers. O, praise, praise the Lord. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Judah is pitched on the east side, toward the rising sun. Such also is the position of the Saints, who, having been called to their rest, are sleeping in Jesus. The sacred dust of those who were once the temple of the Holy Ghost, the habitation of God, through the Spirit, is precious in His sight, and He guards it as His treasure. Whilst the bodies of the just lie in the silent tomb, their souls are happy with Jesus; but ere long, when the morning of the Resurrection will dawn, the Spirit of the Lord will breathe upon them, and the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God will awaken them from their long night of slumber. At length they shall arise, invested with a radiance and glory inexpressible, and the soul and body again being united, they shall enter as the blessed of the Father into the joy of their Lord ■ a praise to the Redeemer throughout the ages of eternity. " Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." (Isaiah 26:19.)

Yes, thou people of Judah, thou art indeed blessed. Wait patiently but a little. Thy morning sun will soon arise. O sing, then, one of the songs of Zion.

I sigh for home, and feel a stranger Here, where all is drear and cold;

Shelter me soon from storms and danger In thy warm and peaceful fold.

Soon, very soon, thy mourning will be turned into joy. The sighs which issue from the tabernacles of the Pilgrims to Zion are heard in heaven.

I sigh for home, in twilight pining;

Grant me soon, thou Prince of Light, Thy face to see, in glory shining, In those realms where all is bright.

Thy mansions are already prepared in thy Father's house above. Tarry but a while on the hill of expectation. Behold the Lord will come quickly. He will not disappoint thy hope.

I sigh for home ■ my spirit panteth After Thee, God of Love;

Give me the joys for which it fainteth, Unite me to thyself above.

Silent and unobserved, the dawning of the day will speedily appear, and, before thou art aware, that Sun will arise which at once and for ever will turn thy darkness into light.

4. THE STANDARD OF THE CAMP OP JUDAH

" Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch his own standard with the ensign of their father's house." (Numbers 2:2.) After the position of the Camp of Judah is stated, mention is made of his standard. Judah had his own peculiar banner, cruciform, with a transverse piece of wood above. His colour was red, as ancient tradition relates, with the figure of a Lion on the field. It was, therefore, the type of the Christian standard, the cross of a crucified Saviour.

Flags were used to give signals to the host for the pitching of the camp, and other military operations. They were wont to be set up on the mountains and hills, that they might be seen afar, and forthwith the army collected around them. And it is even so with the banner of the cross. It is that which the Father makes use of to draw all men unto Him. Wherever it is unfurled, there is a moving, there is a going to and fro, there is a rushing and a hastening forward, and the elect of God flow to it with rejoicing or with tears.

Here we behold men, whom the humiliation of the manger could not affect, and the throne of the Majesty on High failed to alarm, whom the consideration of their everlasting welfare could not allure, nor the thought of eternal destruction impel to seek the salvation of their soul ■ And behold! the cross of Christ in a moment breaks their heart, and the crown of thorns pierces their soul, and the reed given in mockery to the Son of God strikes them to the ground, and the blood, which trickles from the accursed tree, softens and dissolves, as with the power of fire, the heart of stone. And tell me, where do the Rahabs and the Magdaleus become the chaste spouse of Christ; where do the aged Simeons and Hannahs rejoice in the vigour of youth; where are the Sauls breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the saints of the Lord, converted into devoted priests of the Most High; and where do the strong ones become a prey to the Lord? Is it not where the word of the cross is proclaimed, and the banner of the cross is unfurled, and the power of the cross is experienced! This is the standard which is lifted up, and draws all men unto it. Yea, it is the center around which myriads of happy spirits in heaven and on earth are day and night collected in holy

love and brotherhood. For here alone, beneath this banner, is life. When an army is deprived of its standard, it is in deed a great loss, it is a disgrace, and almost worse than a defeat. Our enemies are aware of this, and what is there that they more desire, than to wrest the ensign from our hands. A holy Saviour, a divine Saviour, a princely Saviour, an exalted and glorified Saviour ■ such an one they would leave with us a thousand times, could they but rob us of Him that was crucified. It is against Him that all their arrows of scorn and derision are directed. To cause us to disesteem and contemn such a Saviour ■ this is all their endeavor. Brethren, they would tear from us the banner of our faith, the flag to which we have sworn fidelity; need I exhort you to die rather than suffer this, and lose your hope of heaven. The ensign precedes the host, and so does the cross conduct the army of God in their heavenward progress. It is a crucified Saviour whom they follow, and a look to his cross is their strength and security. Should they, in following him, encounter the storms and fury of the elements ■ they look to the cross. That look inspires courage and confirms the heart in patient endurance. Is their pathway dark and dreary? They look to the cross. The rays of the Saviour's glory shine to them from thence. Darkness is made light before them, and crooked things straight, and they are refreshed and comforted. Are they exposed to the covert and insidious attacks, or to the more vigorous and determined onset of their numerous enemies? They look to the cross. And whether the power of temptation be from without or from within, from a corrupt and evil nature, or from the world, the flesh, and the devil, they are at once assured, by the effects which follow, that the battle is the Lord's, and he will give them the victory. Should sin alarm, or their heart condemn them ■ they look to the cross. God is greater than their hearts, and knoweth all things. He knoweth that they trust in that Saviour who finished the transgression and made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness; that they repose their faith on Him who died and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for them. And they confidently adopt the language of the apostle, and say, " who can lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? " since God, the triune Jehovah, acquits and justifies. Who can condemn whom God hath not condemned! There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. And when to triumph over their last, their dreaded enemy, they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, amid the gloom and silence of their dreary pilgrimage, (for no human friend is near to help or encourage them,) they look to the cross. That friend is near, who sticketh closer than a brother. They fear no evil, his rod and his staff they comfort them. And finally, when they stand before the awful seat of judgment ■ they look to the cross, and because that banner has gone before them to notify their approach as soldiers of the cross, the king will hold out to them the golden sceptre, and the glorified saints and angels will welcome their arrival. Such is the power of the banner of the cross. It brings us safely through, where without it there is no way. It breaks the brazen bolts and iron doors, and cuts a path through the flinty rocks, and over the hills which touch the heavens. When a warrior falls on the battle field, it is a mark of distinguished honour if the flag is thrown over him, and he is covered in its sacred folds. And thus it is with thee, Judah. Shouldst thou be stricken to the ground and faint in the conflict, the bloody banner shall float over thee and protect thee, and bring thee to honour. And when at length thou shalt die, die beneath the shade of this ensign, die under the covering of this red-stained standard of the camp. Thus abide as a good soldier. Be thou faithful unto death, and He will give thee a crown of life.

5. THE ARMIES OF JUDAH.

0, beloved brethren, how should we be astonished, what trembling delight would seize upon us, if but once the protecting host, by which the spiritual Israel is surrounded, should burst the veil which hides them from our view, and render themselves visible. To some it has been permitted to behold, with their mortal eyes, these unseen attendants of the heirs of salvation, Jacob beheld them, after his departure from Laban. As he went on his way, the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said this is God's host; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim, that is, two hosts or camps. (Genesis 32:1-2.) The servant of Elislia was enabled to see the armies of heaven, when the king of Syria sent horses and chariots, and a great army to Dothan; " and they came by night and compassed the city about, and when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots, and his servant said unto him, alas, my master, what shall we do I And he answered, fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said. Lord I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see; and the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." (2 Kings 6:14-17.) The army of Judah is the heavenly choir of guardian angels, all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. They are the mighty ones, who with golden harps surround the throne of the Majesty on high, and behold the face of the Ancient of Days in glory. They are the blessed messengers which wing their way from heaven, and visit the habitations of the children of men on earth, and take back a report of their deeds to the presence of the Father. They are the holy angels who, around the throne of Jehovah, await his high commands, hearkenmg to the voice of his word; who, swifter than the rushing storm or flash of heaven, urge their impetuous flight to help and protect the elect of God.

These blessed visitants are present in the congregation of the saints, and go in and out of the city of God in this lower world, to mingle with our children in their simple pleasures and keep them from harm; to warn our youths of their danger, and conduct them in the right way; to encourage and excite those of mature age, to faithful and active services in the things of God, and refresh them in their labours; to convey cheering messages to the gray-headed, from their home which is now not distant, and permit them to hear before-hand, the first low murmurings of their heavenly harps.

Ah, what sweet but awful sensations must we experience at the thought, that such a band of angels invisibly surrounds us; and who knows how near we may be to that great cloud of witnesses, who before us have entered into rest, and of whom the world was not worthy! Or should the gates through which a Samuel, a Moses, and Elias came back, though but for a moment, from the kingdom of everlasting rest to this globe of mortality ■ should those gates, since they passed through, have been closed, entirely closed. Who can declare it? Enough ■ we live already in the midst of the invisible world. The inhabitants of heaven are our friends and companions, spirits are our ministers and guides. Let us then comfort ourselves with the recollection of this unseen army which surrounds us day and night, the horses and chariots of fire in countless number. And if there be any one here that is dispirited, timid, or easily dejected, at the thought of the multitude of his foes, let me remind him, that "they that be with us, are more than they that be with them." Take this to thy comfort, and be at peace.

6. THE CAPTAIN OF THE CHILDREN OF JUDAH.

" Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, was captain of the children of Judah." The interpretation of his name is experience, a term in every respect applicable to Jesus Christ our Saviour. For who has more experience in battle, than He whose bloody track is seen from the slaughter-field of Gethsemane and Golgotha, and from that sacred spot in the garden of Joseph, where he overcame the grave and swallowed up death in victory? And who has more skill in conflict than He who spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in himself! (Colossians 2:15. See the marginal reading.) Or who is more inured to the toils and pains of war, than He who now for nearly 2000 years, has never slumbered nor slept on his post, but by the power of his sword has safely conducted his weak and feeble church through millions of its foes, conquering and to conquer! Or who is more acquainted with the tumult of the camp, than He against whom an infatuated world has waged a ceaseless warfare, through every stage of time, without one moment of respite! And who is more accustomed to victory and triumph, or laden with the spoils of glory, than He who has made all his enemies his footstool? He may well, therefore, be called Nahshon, an experienced and valiant captain. And happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places. (Deuteronomy 33:29.)

Nahshon was the son of Amminadab, which is, being interpreted, he hath bestowed a people. In this also is typified the Saviour of sinners, to whom God, who is rich in mercy, hath before the foundation of the world, bestowed a lost and ruined people, that, being quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, they might in the ages to come show forth the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4.) And hear the gracious words which express his divine commission and the greatness of his power and love. ’’ All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.) And again, "This is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all whom he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth in him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:39-40.)

Blessed are they who are privileged to hope that they are of the number of those who were given to the Saviour. They are safely kept in the hands of Him, who, in order to effect their redemption, willingly suffered himself to be offered up in sacrifice on the altar of the cross. In his name is their everlasting security. Through Him they are citizens of heaven. Be thou thus encamped, O Judah of God; be thou encamped in peace. Let others vainly confide in their imaginary powers. Be thou humbled in the conviction of thy own helplessness and poverty. Lie low in the dust of self-abasement. Confess the power of divine grace. Be thou nothing, and let Christ be all and in all, and repose on the merits of thy Surety. Abide under that Banner to which thou hast sworn allegiance, and which is thy glory and thy trust, thy triumph and thy freedom. Let thy looks ever be directed to the east, to the morning. Let those that are without, look to the evening, to midnight, where for them also the sky is red, but terrible, and fearfully lowering; thunder-clouds, laden with their curse and everlasting destruction, are gathering blackness.

Fix thy gaze, Judah, upon the opening glories of the east, brighter, and yet brighter every moment. Breathe the sweetness and the fragrance of the morning. This is the good pleasure of thy God,

who ere long will give thee the kingdom in the regions of eternal day. Thou must not regard the night which now surrounds thee. Onwards direct thy view to the Sabbath of eternal rest and peace, which now opens its lovely dawn. Thou must not suffer thine eyes to linger on the dark and troublous vision of thy sins, thy weaknesses, and infirmities, which still cling to thee ■ a body of death. Direct thine ardent glance beyond unto the morning, and feast thine eyes with that great and glorious day of freedom, which is thine even now in promise, a high and holy jubilee. Soar on hope's expanded pinions through the air, and leave behind the darkness and desolation of this lower world. Immortality and light, and crowns of glory, robes of surpassing splendor, palms of victory and triumph, joy and eternal gladness ■ these, all these, await thee in the presence of thy God and Saviour in thine everlasting rest.

Judah, be thou comforted, as well thou mayest be. Though as yet in the dark valley through which thy brightening course conducts thee, sing aloud the praises of thy God.

Yes, onwards, my brethren. For he who is our leader is called Immanuel, God with us.

Amen.

01.3. Issachar

Chapter 3.

ISSACHAR, OR THE COUCHING BETWEEN TWO BURDENS.

" Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute." - Genesis 49:14-15 In the blessing of Jacob, from which the words just read are taken, there are many hidden wonders. Its immediate application had respect to the outward condition of the ten tribes, and the things of this world: but if we penetrate somewhat deeper, by the aid of the Spirit of God, and pierce through the outer surface, we shall discover a rich vein of spiritual truth and knowledge which we greatly stand in need of, and which demands, and will repay our closest investigation. When, a short time ago, we dwelt upon a few words of this remarkable prophecy, namely, that portion which relates to Judah, we already suspected that a mine of wealth lay concealed here, and that the ground sounded, as it were, hollow beneath our feet. And it is upon the self-same ground that we meet to-day, prepared, by the help of the Spirit, to dig silver and gold, where there is only the appearance of hay and stubble.

If we look at Issachar after the flesh, the fifth son of Jacob, the meaning of the text is very evident. It is were foretold that he should dwell in an inland situation, and that his tribe should be agricultural. But the prophecy refers also to the spiritual Issachar. Would to God that his tent were never pitched in the midst of ourselves. It is to the spiritual application of this prophecy, so strikingly portrayed in our text, that we would now direct your attention.

We see here, 1. The position of Issachar.

2. How he came into that state.

3. The toil and danger to which he is subjected in the same.

1. THE POSITION OF ISSACHAR.

" Issachar is a strong ass." There is nothing prepossessing in this comparison. Judah is a lion’s whelp. Naphtali is a hind let loose. Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over a wall. Jonathan is an eagle; the Shulamite a dove; Israel is a rose. In all these figures there is something agreeable to the mind. But ■ a strong ass ■ the name is in itself sufficient to deter us from seeking a near acquaintance with the person whom it designates. And yet who can tell how many of us may come under this description in the book of God! On what account Issachar is so named we shall better understand when his spiritual state, as contained in the figure, is unveiled to us. Where do we behold Issachar? " Between two burdens." In these words the patriarch gives no pleasing representation of his son. If he had described him as moving onward between two burdens, or borders, (as by some the word is rendered,) we should have said " Only’ wait a little; his present difficulties will be surmounted, and the glorious land will be found!" But no, he is couching down, and therefore his case is the worse. To be so circumstanced is

always dangerous. How alarming is the denunciation of God against the lukewarm! " I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou were cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16) See how God condemns the wavering and undecided, who are neither faithful to his own colors nor to those of the world; who do not, indeed, reject him, yet they choose not his service, and thus vacillate between both their friends and foes. He distinctly declares that they are his enemies, and shall be treated as such. " He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." (Matthew 12:30.) And if we suppose the Lord in these our days to examine his church, and see how many thousands of those who wish to be regarded as his faithful ministers, halt in their preaching between the pure gospel and their own wisdom, we may well imagine Him to say, '' I would that ye were either believers or unbelievers; but ye are neither one nor the other." Yes, unbelief itself would seem to be better than this unholy indecision, this uncertainty and want of determination in a matter of infinite moment. But Issachar does not properly belong to those who are neither cold nor hot, neither for nor against Christ ■ neither Christians nor heathen. He is for Christ, and so far, in a certain sense, may be said to believe; he appears to belong to the kingdom of God, and yet it is far from being well with him. He lies between Canaan and Egypt, between the state of a converted and unconverted man. We cannot account him one of the men of this world, much less can we esteem him a child of God. We dare not say that he still belongs to the ranks of the crooked and perverse generation of the ungodly, nor yet can we number him among the elect, who are kings and priests unto God for ever and ever. The position which he occupies is a middle one, between the kingdom of grace and that of Belial. And, remaining there, the lot which will hereafter be assigned him, will not be to sit down with the citizens of Zion, in the kingdom of their God, but to be cast into outer darkness, with the workers of iniquity, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Let us consider our Issachar more closely, and examine both his spiritual and external condition. His outward circumstances, his life, and course of conduct, appear really commendable, and produce a very favourable impression on the mind. Do you think that you will find him walking in the counsel of the ungodly, or standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of the scornful?(Psalms 1:1) No. You do him great wrong in seeking for him there. He has left this spiritual Sodom, and separated himself far from it. He no longer burns incense on the high places and in the groves, and the assemblies of those who drink iniquity like water, are his abhorrence and aversion; he hates and opposes their evil courses. You can never discover him among the haunts of the wine-bibber, or in the public assemblies, where a blind and deluded world, as if possessed by a spirit of giddiness and infatuation, madly rages and tumultuates in unbridled pursuit of the phantom pleasure, and where the people dance to the sound of the pipe, Satan himself conducting their orgies. He has nothing in common with those who use as their watch-word " Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die;" and he wallows not with the swine in the mire. Nor can you find him among the followers of a fond and flattering morality, who walk indeed uprightly, and conduct themselves with propriety, but desire to know nothing of a godly or God-fearing life, being fully satisfied with the rectitude of their intentions; who cast away from them the word and the sacraments, the commandments and the kingdom of God, as old and tattered garments, or who despise them as the playthings of the childish and the weak. No. Among the quiet in the land, among them that fear God doth Issachar abide. Where the gospel is faithfully preached; where the banner of the cross is unfurled; where men confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father; where the word of Christ dwells in men richly in all wisdom, and they teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and holy hands are lifted up to heaven; (Colossians 3:16.) where they lie down in the green pastures of the everlasting gospel, and drink from the living fountains of the sure mercies of David, life and fulness of joy; there is Issachar to be found; there hath he pitched his tabernacle and tent. He dwells among the saints, unto their assembly is he united.

What! ' Issachar, then, a hypocrite, and a deceiver? By no means. That cannot be said of him. Hypocrites are altogether a different class. This generation of Pharisees do not couch between two boundaries, but are still in the midst of Egypt.

What then? If Issachar attaches himself to the church and people of God, of whom the world is not worthy, and that with uprightness and sincerity, what lacketh he then? Alas! much, very much; yea, all that is essential to a state of grace. He dwells in the congregation of the righteous, but only outwardly, not in spirit and in truth. He is no living member of that holy body of which Christ is the head; united, indeed, externally, but not really incorporated into the body of Christ. He is no fruitful branch of the tree of God; nor a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree. (Romans 11:17.) He is not so engrafted in it, as to bloom and flourish by the communication of its sap and life. The bond which unites him to the church of God is human only, and corruptible, not spiritual and divine. Do we look at his state? It is no longer that of Egyptian darkness, arising from the prevalence of strong delusions. No. He is rich in the knowledge of salvation; he knows the catechism by memory, is well read in the Bible, and familiar with multitudes of sweet and animating hymns, and many accounts of awakened sinners and established saints.

What then is his state? It is one of proud self-sufficiency, of reliance on supposed merit and righteousness of his own, a condition of fancied security, attained by efforts which he has put forth alone and unaided. In hearing and reading, in his separation from the world, and in all his experience and attainments, all his hopes and dependences have centred in self. The Holy Ghost has no part in his illumination. He is not taught of God. What he has thus acquired remains crude and undigested, administering neither to his nourishment nor strength; or it is as ill-gotten wealth, locked up in coffers, and making no return; or as costly ointment, which yields no perfume. Do we observe his course of life? Here there is nothing particular to be remarked. Issachar maintains an irreproachable conduct in the eyes of mankind. He lives in quiet, is domestic, retiring, well-conducted, active, honorable. He chooses the society and friendship of Christians, and despises the pleasures of the world. But is this the walk of which God speaks, when He says, " I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect?" (Genesis 17:1.) And to which Isaiah refers in the exhortation, " house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord;" (Isaiah 2:5.). And of which the apostle makes mention, "Our conversation is in heaven;" (Php 3:20.) and, again, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25.) Can we recognize in Issachar the operation of the Spirit of God? Can we perceive in him indications of the presence of that well of water, which springeth up unto everlasting life? Alas! what can he be? He is partly the child of good education, and good habits; partly of a self-sought spirituality, which the Holy Ghost never will own, since he has indeed no share in effecting it. Do we regard Issachar, as it respects the peculiar duties of religion? Here, too, is the appearance of that which is good and right; but are those prayers and praises which he daily offers up, either at home or in the great congregation, acceptable to God? Are they a sweet smelling savour, which ascends before the

throne, from gifts which have been first received from heaven? Are they incense kindled by the Spirit of God, and arising from the censer of a broken and a contrite heart, which, in God’s sight, is of great price? Oh no! He has, on the contrary, prepared his offering himself, having first obtained it from his own resources! Issachar prays when he will pray, not when he is moved and constrained to pray. It is Issachar that prays, not Christ and His Spirit praying within him.

How unhappy is his state between the two burdens. He is a Christian, without the new birth; he knows the lost state of man, without himself having felt it; he is learned in spiritual things, without being enlightened, and believes in Jesus, without reposing confidence in His merits; he esteems himself righteous, and yet is not so; he speaks of the evidences of a state of grace, while he is not in that state himself; he imagines that his life and conversation accord with the requirements of the gospel, and yet he is nothing more than a natural man, one who has experienced no real change within, nor can show even the smallest work which bears the impress of the Spirit of God, but only that which his own hands have effected. The new man is not created in him, but the old man has put on the garb of piety.

Such is the state and condition of Issachar, no longer in Egypt, nor yet in Canaan. He has come out of the world, in a certain sense at least, but has not approached the kingdom of grace. He bears the Christian form, and is evangelical in his notions and in his course of conduct; but he does not possess that life which is the gift of God alone ■ a new heart.

2. THE MOTIVES WHICH SWAYED ISSACHAR.

Issachar couches between two burdens. But how has he come into this situation? Our text informs us briefly, but pointedly. " He saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant." Issachar attained his position not by the drawing of the Father and the call of grace, or the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit; but by the impulse of his own natural heart. Did the painful sense of sin drive him to the Saviour? Did the thick clouds and darkness of Sinai, the thunder of Ebal, the earnest desire of redemption, the anxious solicitude for the salvation of his soul, impel him to flee for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before him in the gospel! No! Far different were his motives and feelings in assuming the profession of religion.

" He saw that rest was good." What kind of rest? That which is vouchsafed is in Christ? Peace with God? Deliverance from the curse and the power of sin, and from the miserable bondage and tyranny of the law? No, brethren. The rest which he sought was entirely of another description.

" He saw the land that it was pleasant." What land? Was it that land of beauty and of brightness in the world on high, to which Jesus is himself the way or was it the kingdom of grace watered by the dews of heaven, and on which the Sun of Righteousness ever sheds his invigorating rays? Did his thoughts and desires tend thither? Did he feel a secret longing after that as his home? No; this cannot be said of Issachar. The goodness of the rest, and the pleasantness of the land which Issachar desired, were quite of another kind. And what were they? The causes, brethren, which move men to enter upon so dubious and unsanctified a state, are various. One man feels himself attracted by witnessing the concord and brotherly love which prevail among the quiet in the land. He has, perhaps, had bitter experience of the falsehood and treachery of the world, and has thus learned that it can neither be trusted nor believed, and that it is, moreover, full of rancor and animosity. He has confided in friends, and been grievously betrayed. Deeply pained, he looks

around him for rest. His eyes fall upon the congregation of the saints. He perceives that they are of one heart and one mind, and are united to each other by the sacred bonds of love, and dwell together as brethren. This pleases him well. He sees that it is good, and his resolution is fixed. He joins himself to the society of the pious.

Another man has, by nature, a tender disposition; he is easily moved, and loves affecting sights and sacred solemnities, and the pleasing emotions which they are calculated to excite. The occupations of the children of God, therefore, their zeal and ardor in the service of religion, and their fervent devotion, present to him no inconsiderable attractions. He sees the land that it is pleasant, and says, " it is good to be here. Here will I build my tabernacle, and seek my rest." A third has a mind of a contemplative and thoughtful character. He meets with the word of God. Here he finds food in abundance; here he can exercise his intellect and powers of thought, and give them full scope. With lively interest he applies himself to reading and diligent investigation. It is his delight henceforth to dwell among those who make the Bible the rule of their lives, and he takes pleasure with them in a mutual communication of Christian ideas and hopes, and in scriptural researches. It is from choice that he associates himself with the people of God, without being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, (1 Peter 1:23.) A fourth, gifted with a quick perception of the sublime and beautiful, is delighted with the glowing visions and delineations, with the attractive similitudes, with the lovely and affecting representations, and the splendid imagery with which the word of God abounds. He reads the inspired volume with the warm enthusiasia with which he takes up a brilliant production of an earthly poet; and he professes the religion of the Bible from the intellectual pleasure and mental gratification which it affords. There is no conversion here. A fifth observes, that in the houses of the just infinitely more order prevails than in those of the children of this world. The peace which is found here, and the quiet, the love, and the continual cheerfulness; the blessing also of the Lord, which ever rests upon them, and their prosperity ■ O, how do all these things commend themselves to his notice, especially if he considers the great difference which there is between his own house and theirs. "He sees this rest that it is good." "I am wearied, he thinks, with incessant noise and bickering. It shall hereafter be otherwise. I will erect an altar in my house." And he does erect one. He reads, and sings, and prays. The noise and tumult cease, and behold the house is changed and renewed. Yes, brethren, the house only, alas! not the heart. The body is there, and the exterior of religion, but the Spirit and the life are wanting. It is the form of godliness, without the power thereof. The man draws nigh unto God with his lips, but his heart is far from him. He has gone out of the worlds but the world has not gone out of him. The garment is changed, but the person remains the same.

Behold, my brethren, such is Issachar, couching between two burdens. " He sees that rest is good, and the land that it is pleasant." He is not conscious of the longing for salvation, and the hunger and thirst after righteousness, nor of the Holy Ghost moving him to the gospel; but the privileges of this present life, in which the children of God rejoice, excite his desire to partake of them. He becomes pious in his own way, quiet retiring, observant of the duties of religion by his own endeavors. He applies himself to religion as he would apply himself to a business, a study, or one of the liberal arts, and appropriates to himself whatsoever belongs to the life and being of the Christian. Two things only are wanting, and with them all that constitutes spiritual existences, that marks and distinguishes the character of the child of God; namely, the broken and contrite heart,

in which alone the Lord will dwell, and the Holy Spirit, respecting whom it is said, " If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Issachar! ah! unhappy Issachar, who couches between two burdens, and seest that rest is good, and the land that it is pleasant, ■ the land that is beyond the Jordan shalt thou never inherit, nor enjoy the eternal Sabbath, that rest which rernaineth for the people of God!

3. THE TOIL AND DANGER OF ISSACHAR.

We have seen the position of Issachar, and we know also the motives by which he was influenced. Let us now glance for a moment at the toil and danger to which he is subjected. His pain and misery are set forth in the text, " He bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant to tribute."

He bowed his shoulder to bear. There lies a heavy weight upon him, under which he sighs and pants; and this burden is ■ his sins perhaps? 0, would to God that they were felt as such, then would he soon be in a better state! It is, on the contrary, the religion which he has assumed that is his burden. Our Saviour says, indeed, " My yoke is easy, and my burden is light;" but of this Issachar is not sensible.

Let me request you to turn to Isaiah 10:27. It is there said, " and it shall come to pass in that day," the day of the New Testament, ■ " that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed, because of thy anointing." The yoke falls off, when the neck is bathed with oil. And when we are anointed with the Holy Ghost, and made partakers of his grace, then is the burden taken off our shoulder; then are the law and the service of God no longer an oppressive yoke, a heavy burden, but easy and pleasant, our comfort and our joy. We stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and are not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Christ having made us free, we are free indeed. (Galatians 5:1.) But Issachar is not anointed, and therefore his shoulder is bowed down to bear, and sinks under the weight. He has not gone to the Saviour with a heart deeply sensible of its need, and moved to repentance, to receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace. Issachar has changed and renewed himself, and would, by his own endeavors, walk in the path of the true Christian. He would assume the character of a child of God; he would soar upwards, but has no wings; he would sing and pray, but has neither the spirit by which believers are actuated, nor their delight in holy exercises; he would run and walk on the way to Zion, but is lame, and has not applied to the good Physician to be healed; he would keep the law, but alas! He is destitute of power and love, of joy, and of strength!

O how hard is the service in which he is engaged, how grievous the bondage under which he is oppressed, how vainly does he weary himself in the course which he has chosen; in the hopeless endeavor to save himself by works and righteousness of his own; in labour without fruit, toil without reward!

Issachar bowed his shoulder to bear; and what is he? A servant unto tribute. What a striking representation! His prayers and services, both in public and private, are but as tribute, which he knows that he must pay; and he brings it, not as a child, willingly and joyfully, but as a servant, by compulsion, as though it were extracted with reluctancy from his hard earned pittance. The Spirit of grace and supplication has not been poured out upon him. He has no real union with Him in whom is life. From the children of God, the tribute of prayer and praise flows freely, as water from

the fountain; but Issachar is a dry well; how can it flow from thence When the hour arrives for the payment of his tribute, he feels that he is compelled to lay down the sum required, and, with much labour, it is produced and cast down before God; but the coin is base, and will not be accepted, for since it bears not the image of the second, but of the first Adam, it will never be received into the treasury of God.

Behold, such is Issachar; not a child of the house, but a poor " servant of tribute," who has nothing, and yet must pay, and who, moreover, discharges his debt, with base coin, which, as such is rejected. Since he is the bearer of such a burden, and groans under the galling yoke of self-imposed services, and bends beneath the severe rod of the law, without vigor and animation, he is thence called " a strong ass."

And, O, it is painful and distressing to think of his misery and danger. The man imagines, in his blindness, that he really belongs to the kingdom of God; but, alas! he ranks as much with " them that are without," as the careless and unthinking world. He has apparently succeeded well in conforming his life to that of the children of God, and therefore cherishes the vain delusion, that he is one of their number; and as he is frequently regarded and treated as such by true believers, his blindness becomes the more hopeless, and he is confirmed in his carnal security. The poor, pitiable man! He thinks that he dwells in Canaan, but his tent is near to Tophet, and on the brink of the pit of destruction. He dreams that he is in Jerusalem, but, alas! he couches not far from the Dead Sea, near Adma and Zeboim. And when the Lord shall come with fire and brimstone, He cannot spare Issachar; and when his heart within him would almost break with compassion towards that unhappy one, couching between the burdens, He must consume him in his wrath, and sweep him away together with the rest of the ungodly, with the besom of destruction. (Isaiah 14:23.)

O let every one of us, therefore, who believes himself to he in Jerusalem, come now before God with the earnest supplication of David, " Search me, God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalms 139:23-24.) Be assured, that in the last day nothing will avail but that which the Holy Ghost has witnessed and wrought in us, and enabled us to do. All that is our own will be burned up as hay. All self-sought spirituality and self-imposed service; all self-wrought piety and holiness, will be deemed of no value, and committed to the flames. Then no inquiry will be made after the knowledge which you have attained, merely by catechisms and preaching, but only after what you have learned of the Holy Spirit in the school of Christ. It will not then be asked how often you have prayed and given thanks: but whether your prayers and thanksgivings were uttered in the Spirit, in the name of Jesus. No examination will then be instituted with regard to your communion with believers upon earth, but respecting your union with him who is the life ■ whether you are one with Christ, who is the Living Head.

Alas! many are the unhappy Issachars in the world, who couch between two burdens, who assume the profession of religion from some unhallowed motive, receiving no sanction in the word of God, and who are not indebted to the Spirit of God for the least portion of their religion. God be merciful unto them, and open their eyes, that they may see their real state. Many, no doubt, are self-deceived and dazzled by the gospel form and complexion of the religion which they have assumed. It is but an outward appearance; it is no reality. The covering is there; but where, under

the covering, is the broken heart, the contrite spirit, the seed of the heavenly birth, the new creature? Where is the thirst after the living water, after the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus? Where are all these things which are of the operation of the Holy Ghost, and which alone constitute a Christian? They are wanting.

O may a God of mercy preserve us from such a fearful delusion, which must eventually overwhelm the deceived soul in everlasting destruction. May he terrify us with the thunders of his power and with the voice of the trumpet, from couching down, in this unholy state, between the borders of Egypt and Canaan, and conduct us all to that blessed rest into which they that believe have already entered, that we may say in truth, " The Spirit of God hath created me, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given me life."

Amen.

01.4. The Vision of The Night

Chapter 4 THE VISION OF THE NIGHT.

'' I saw by the night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle-trees that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white." - Zechariah 1:8. The prophecies of Zechariah are esteemed as some of the sweetest and most pleasant fruits which grow on the tree of the Old Testament. This prophet has much resemblance both to Isaiah and Ezekiel. Glowing as the latter, and rich as he in sublime descriptions, and grand, striking, and mysterious visions, he shares with the former the name of Evangelical prophet. The Anointed of God, with his kingdom, forms the central point and axis around which the fire- wheel of all his flaming imagery of visions and revelations continually revolves. All the glory is given to the Messiah. Thus, in the picture before us, the most prominent object in the foreground, which leaves all the rest in the shade and in the distance, is the long expected Saviour of the world, the testimony of whom is the spirit of prophecy. (Revelation 19:10.) It is a beautiful and consoling representation. Let us examine it more closely. We will consider, 1. The time in which the vision was beheld.

2. The vision itself, in its consolatory signification.

1. THE TIME IN WHICH THE VISION WAS BEHELD.

Zechariah expressly states, that it was a vision of the night. He means in the first place, the natural night; when the wearied children of men repose themselves in sleep. The Lord then came to him and opened the eyes of his mind, and permitted him to see manifestly depicted before him, in all their brilliant coloring, the forms which he describes. The Lord would effectually imprint upon his mind that great truth, that He who keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. It is therefore put forth, not as a mere statement, but illustrated by a palpable representation, and revealed to him, not in the daytime, but in the shadows of the night. Of such a nocturnal visitation from God, almost all the saints, both of the Old and New Testament, were enabled to testify; and Elihu speaks of it to Job as though it were of ordinary occurrence. " In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man" ■ (Job 33:15-17.) O how many are there, who like Nicodemus, trace their first acquaintance with Jesus to that silent hour. When our wearied body is at rest, and when surrounded by darkness, we are freed from the agitating occupations of the day, our souls are more quick in their perception, our thoughts more free and unrestrained, our reflections more deep and penetrating, our conscience more powerful in its operations, more unchecked and pointed in its appeals. Then does the trumpet of the word give a clear and certain sound; then peals around us the thunder of the curse; then does the call to repentance shake and alarm our inmost souls; and if the sight of our sins be vouchsafed us, of our base and unprofitable life, of our broken vows and resolutions, of our defilement and dissimulation ■ if that death which awaits us, that final judgment to which we are hastening, and that bleeding Saviour whom we despise; if these awful visions pass before us, and

invade the solitude of our chamber, and stand around our bed ■ O how terrific, how appalling the spectacle! Whither can we fly from such dreadful sights? To the gay and thoughtless company of our friends? They are buried in sleep. To the distractions of daily occupation? They are at an end. To the places of concourse and the busy haunts of men? They are forsaken. It is night, and there is no sound to affect the ear, nothing to engage the eye, or restrain the vigor of the mind. At such a time your little bark of the soul is driven out upon the restless wave. You cast anchor once and again;. but the anchor takes no hold. You anxiously look around for a haven of rest. But, behold in every haven the tempest rages as in the open sea, and the abyss is yawning beneath. You seek to appease the storm within, and say to yourself, " Be at rest; there is no danger. Why art thou anxious? " But no consoling thoughts can at such a season avail. Your perplexity and distress increase, till at length you find Him who said to the sea, " Peace, be still;" and then there is a great calm. Your danger is passed, your fears are gone; you are now secure and happy in the haven where you would be.

Multitudes of Christians can number, in their own experience many such painful, but not the less salutary, night scenes, and can say, in a certain sense, with the Temanite, " In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, fear came upon me, and trembling which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes; there was silence, and I heard a voice saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker?" (Job 4:13-17.)

There are some, perhaps, present, who, absorbed by day in the cares of the world, or hurried into the vortex of its dissipations and pleasures, hear not the call of God to consider their ways. 0, that such visions of the night, such communications from heaven, may soon be vouchsafed you; and that the voice of the Almighty may reach your inmost soul. God grant that it may be this very night, for we know not that another shall be added to your number. May it not already be said to some one, who now hears me, to-morrow thou shalt die! Let this thought be with you, brethren, when next you retire to rest upon your beds.

" I saw by the night," saith the prophet, and he appears to intimate by that expression, the circumstances under which he beheld the vision. Zechariah lived about five hundred years before the first Advent. Together with his parents, he was carried by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, and afterwards, in consequence of the decree of Cyrus, returned, with the first of the captivity, who sought the land of their fathers; and he assisted in laying the foundation both of the city and temple.

It was then a happy time, a season of rejoicing and of cheerful hope. The covenant God of Israel had made manifest His care for his people, in a way which could not be misunderstood, and all things were full of joyful expectation of the golden age that was about to return. It was not then night to the people of Israel, but bright and shining day. But this was not of long continuance. The Samaritans sought to interrupt the harmony which prevailed. For scarcely were the walls of the city and of the temple commenced, with alacrity and gladness, when these strangers, who were more heathen than Jews, proposed to associate themselves with the children of Abraham in the work, and thus to acquire a right in the temple of the Lord, and in the administration of its services. This could never be allowed. Hence arose implacable hostility, for the Samaritans sent letters to

Babylon, calumniating the Jews engaged in the undertaking, representing them with great bitterness as a faithless and rebellious race, who might endanger the peace of the Persian monarchy. Credit was given to these base accusations, and a royal edict issued, by which the building of Jerusalem was forbidden, and permission given the Samaritans to compel the Jews, by fire and sword, to desist from the work. Then followed a time of tumult and distress to the people of God, and their hopes perished. Their brightest prospects were in a moment over-clouded, and God seemed to have again forsaken His inheritance. The most lovely morning was unexpectedly converted into a night of gloom.

Allusion, no doubt, was made to these painful circumstances, when the prophet said in my text, " I saw by the night." It seemed as though this external obscurity inwardly prevailed in his soul, as if the day had declined within him, and was succeeded by the night. And how should it be otherwise! Every thing around him tended to produce such oppressive sensations; his gloomy forebodings enveloped his soul in thick clouds of doubt and despondency. No indications of the watchful and protecting care of the Almighty were visible. Yet, notwithstanding, dark as it appeared both outwardly and within, Zechariah was enabled to say of himself, " I saw by the night, and behold! "

" I saw by the night.'' Some can speak of the night who have passed through it, and are now rejoicing in the blessings of the morning. It is night, in spiritual things, in proportion as our eyes are darkened. Then the hand which has assigned our pain and suffering is unperceived, we are lost in the wilderness of uncertainty, and no outlet can he found either on the right hand or on the left; or a fire falls upon our spiritual building, and we know not whence the flames have been kindled, by which our honour, our name, and domestic happiness are destroyed, whether they are derived from heaven or from hell.

It is night, when the world misunderstands and calumniates us, and we cry to God to interpose in our behalf, and there is neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regardeth; or when we lie sunk in the deepest need, and stroke upon stroke is laid upon us, and our prayer cannot reach the clouds, but is dissipated and lost in the air around us, no help appears, no aid is at hand, no prospect of deliverance opens before us, no explication is given of our embarrassments, and our wanderings in the dark valley remain an incomprehensible dispensation, a deep mystery, the meaning and intention and final issue of which are altogether hidden from our view. When it is thus with any poor soul, he is enveloped in darkness. The greater light which rules the day has set before his eyes. He is the man of whom Job speaks, when he says, that his way is hid, and that God hath hedged him in. (Job 3:23.)

O how great, how blessed the change, when God says respecting a soul, " let there be light, and there is light." The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. Thus it was with Job, when the scope and intention of all his afflictions were made known to him; and with Hagar, when the angel pointed out to her the well of water in the wilderness; and with Abraham, when a voice came to him from heaven, " lay not thy hand upon the lad," and his fiery trial was at once terminated; and with Jacob, when that testimony was borne him, " thou hast power with God, and with man, and hast prevailed;" and the Lord blessed him in the night, after his severe conflict. And many such visitations from on high are vouchsafed the children of God, even in our own days. Salvation comes to their house as an unexpected guest, their trials melt away and disperse as a veil of mist upon the mountains, or a bright light from heaven suddenly illuminates their path. But my brethren,

this can scarcely be termed, to see by the night. It is rather the day-break shedding its lovely rays, its opening glories, into the cave of Adullam. (1 Samuel 22:1; Micah 1:15) The Saviour then manifests himself to us as he doth not unto the world, and our unbelieving doubts and fears are at once dispelled; and whilst we acknowledge the power and presence of the Godhead, we exclaim with grateful heart. Lord thou hast changed my night into day. (John 14:22; John 20:27-28) But when the sun remains hidden behind the clouds, and the footsteps of Jehovah are in the great waters, and men, without seeing their way plainly, follow the guidance of their God, and rest in naked faith on the Divine assurance, " what I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter;" and, believing in opposition to human reasonings, and hoping against hope, repose simply upon him who has said, " When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" ■ (Isaiah 43:2) When, entrenching themselves in such promises, as in a strong hold, and looking by faith to that Angel of the Lord who said to Manoah, " Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret or wonderful?"(Judges 13:18) and by this name, " The Wonderful," they are refreshed as with milk and honey in the desert ■ When, without tasting, or seeing, or feeling, they rejoice in the very present help of that God who delivered Daniel from the jaws of the lion, and preserved the three children in the burning fiery furnace, and commanded a fish to take up Jonah, and keep him as in an ark of safety in the deep waters ■ when they rely on that God who sent dogs to Lazarus, that they should lick his sores and mitigate his pain, and who appointed ravens to minister to Elijah, and feed him in the wilderness ■ Then, brethren, then may it be said, that they see visions in the darkness, that they perceive God through the thick and lowering clouds; and in the words of Zechariah they may exclaim, " I saw by the night and behold!"

There is another description of night of a yet more troublous kind, which David had in view when he said, " Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit." But even then we are not left without hope. We have that most precious promise, that while we trust in the Lord and stay ourselves upon our God, a light shall rise in obscurity, and our darkness shall be as noon day. (Isaiah 58:10.) When Satan assaults me with his fearful allurements or his fiery darts, and I am left without help or succour, then has the sun set beneath my horizon. But I see by the night, and behold, mine eye rests upon Him, who to death is its plague, and to the grave its destruction; and that great truth is brought home to my mind, that in Him I have already ’’ overcome the wicked one," and he can no more put me to shame. Then it is given me, at the sight of my victorious Head, to triumph in the conflict, and to enjoy peace in the midst of tumult and alarm. What is this but a vision of the night?

When, after a painful fall, I am alarmed with a sense of my sin and misery, and almost overwhelmed with despair, then I sit in darkness, the light shineth not about me, my sins are greater than I can bear. At length I am enabled to think of that grace, which recovers the children of God from the horrible pit and from the miry clay, and sets their feet upon a rock, and orders their going. I call to mind the good Shepherd, who left the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness, and came to seek and to save that which was lost, and did not desist until he found it, and laid it on his shoulders, and carried it home rejoicing. how cheering the sight! As yet the Lord has not manifested himself to me, nor can I rejoice; but mercy has again visited me, and though confidence and hope have not returned, yet "my soul waiteth for the Lord, yea, more than they that

watch for the morning." (Psalms 130:6.) When the Lord takes from me the sense of His indwelling through the Spirit, and withdraws from me the light of his countenance, and leaves me to the experience of my utter sinfulness; when the vigor of my spiritual life fails, and the indications of my state of grace lose their special character; when faith, which before could rejoice, gives utterance only to a poor compressed and feeble cry, " O God, be not severe to me; " when love is withered by the wintry blast, or chilled and frozen, so that I am compelled to exclaim, with David, " I am like unto one appointed to die," and I can no longer dare to regard myself as of the camp of Judah; when I transgress without tears, and stumble and fall without contrition, and read the word without delight, and pray without earnestness; Oh, this is indeed a season of spiritual darkness. But there is a faith which can dissipate even such a darkness as this, and under the full conviction of our spiritual poverty, needs not the aid of sensible perception. He who is " the Amen, the faithful and true witness," (Revelation 3:14.) stands before me in this my low estate, and I hear him saying in the spirit, " In a little wrath I hid my ’’ face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee." (Isaiah 54:8-10.) By faith I behold a covenant God in Christ Jesus; I look to "Him that justifieth the ungodly," that requireth only empty vessels, that he may fill them with his glory. (Romans 4:5.) The mystery of righteousness opens itself before me; I see that I am justified and saved, not by works of my own, but only through the merits of Jesus; that my faith, hope, and charity must be derived from Him: that His intercession alone can make my approach acceptable unto the Father; and while the senses are dead within me, and my heart is sunk in wretchedness and misery, it is given to me by the Holy Ghost to cast myself by faith on that Saviour, who hath said, "my grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness." Then is the night turned into day. The sun has not indeed dispersed the overhanging clouds, and his bright beams have not yet penetrated my inmost soul; but I can by faith enter within the veil, and I behold the sun, though many are the clouds which intervene. Then can I say that I see by the night, and give praises to Him who hath opened mine eyes to behold.

2. THE VISION OF THE NIGHT.

What was the vision which our prophet beheld? Truly it was a lovely sight, and it remained stationary before his wondering eyes in all the brightness and freshness of its coloring. An angel also talked with him, and showed him what these things were, but we need not refer to his words, because even the vision itself speaks to us " good words and comfortable words." It is full of the richest consolations, the most cheering promises.

Let us now turn aside and see this great sight. The place whereon we stand is holy ground. (Exodus 3:3-5) The man who stands among the myrtle-trees, seems to be clad in bright and glittering armour, and as appears in the sequel, is the Angel of the covenant, the man Christ Jesus. Our Lord reveals himself to his people under different characters, suited to their various wants and circumstances. Is any one of them timid and distrustful? he unveils his face, beaming with a love beyond that of a mother, and exclaims, " Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." (Isaiah 49:15.) Behold "as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." (Isaiah 66:13.) Have any wandered from the fold? The good Shepherd leaves them not to perish upon the mountains, and upon every high hill, but seeks them out, that he may deliver them out of

all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. (Ezekiel 34:12.) Is any sick? he reveals himself as the good physician, who healeth all our diseases. (Psalms 103:3.) Is any one dispirited and alarmed? instantly he stands before him with his sword drawn in his hand. As Captain of the host of the Lord is he now come. (Joshua 5:13-14.) Does any trembling sinner feel oppressed under a sense of the wrath of God? the Saviour manifests himself as coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah; glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength. And to the inquiry, who is this, and wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine fat? the incarnate God replies, " I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." (Isaiah 63:1-4) Or is any tied and bound with the chain of his sins? the Lord Jesus makes Himself known, as sent " to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," (Isaiah 61:1) as the mighty deliverer, who bears " the keys of hell and of death." (Revelation 1:18.)

Now in the days of Zechariah a warrior was, of all men, held in chief estimation, for there was then war in the land. And behold, the Keeper of Israel reveals himself as such; " I saw by the night, and behold a man" Our Lord is a man. This is a truth full of comfort, for it reminds us that our own nature is united to the Godhead, that it is borne by Him who sitteth upon the throne. Christ is a man; how sweet the assurance. The Church is his bride; she bears His name. This blessed privilege applies equally to every individual believer. (Isaiah 49:14-16.) He will not deny us, but acknowledge us for his own. Our Saviour a man! O blessed truth. It is in the form of man that we are best enabled, that we love most to contemplate him. In that form he lives in our thoughts, he stands before us as our Advocate with the Father, when we kneel at his footstool. We think of his wounds, we trace with wonder and adoring gratitude the prints of the nails in his hands and feet. We here behold the fountain of every blessing, the source of our peace. And is it not as man that the Son of God was enabled to suffer in our behalf, to be wounded for our transgressions, to die that we might live? Is it not thus that he makes manifest to saints and angels a love which is stronger than death? Well, therefore, may we rejoice, when we can say respecting our visions of the Almighty, " I saw by the night, and behold, a man." The man whom Zechariah beheld, rode upon a horse. In the Song of Solomon the church is represented under the figure of horses; " I have compared thee, my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariot." (Song of Solomon 1:9) And in the tenth chapter of the prophecy from which my text is taken, it is said, " The Lord of hosts hath visited his flock, the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle." We may therefore conclude that it is the Church which is represented by the red horse in the vision, that it is ourselves who are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

We are led and directed by His Spirit and His word, and His hand nourishes and supports us. At first we bear the yoke of the law, and are oppressed with that grievous bondage which neither we nor our fathers could bear. Then, being delivered from the law, we become the servants of righteousness, and walk abroad in the green pastures, and by the still waters of grace and comfort, and rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. The battle-horse of Job is an apt emblem of the confirmed Christian, who is strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. " He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength, he goeth on to meet the armed men. He

mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted, neither tumeth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage, neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets. Ha, ha. He smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting." (Job 39:21-25.) But if at any time he is elated by the thought of his own imaginary power and glory, the Lord takes effectual means to humble him. He passes the yoke over his beautiful neck, and sends him with Judah to plow, or with Jacob into the valley to break the clods. (Hosea 10:11.)

It is through the man Christ Jesus that we are made more than conquerors. He fighteth for us, and by the arm of His power every enemy is put in subjection under our feet; and when at length He shall come again in his glorious majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we shall accompany his chariot of victory, and participate in the splendours of his triumph.

There is another truth which is intimated by the appearance of the man on horse in the vision, namely, the speedy help and deliverance which the Lord affords to his church in every difficulty or distress. If the Saviour of mankind still walked upon the earth in the garb of mortality, the faith of many a child of sorrow would be greatly exercised whilst He was administering relief to a fellow-sufferer, and often would be heard the cry of the sister of Lazarus, " Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But now He is a very present help to his people wherever his aid is sought. In places the most remote from each other, it may at the same moment be said, in the language of the church of old, " The voice of my Beloved! Behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart. Behold he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice." (Song of Solomon 2:8-9.) In the hour of need his presence is manifested both by day and by night, and even when the doors are shut, He stands in the midst, as He visited the disciples at Jerusalem, and says, "Peace be unto you." When we may suppose him far distant, " Behold, He stands at the door and knocks; if any man hear His voice and open the door, He comes in to him and sups with him, and he with Him." (Revelation 3:20.) To the righteous there ariseth a light in the darkness. The bright shining of the Saviour’s countenance beams through their habitation and refreshes their soul. They can say with Habakkuk, " Thou ridest upon thy horses and thy chariots of salvation." (Habakkuk 3:8.) The horse beheld in the vision was red, as representing the church, which is covered with the blood and righteousness of the Saviour, and thereby obtains deliverance from sin and guilt, and from the power and dominion of the wicked one. And whence cometh He that sitteth upon the horse! Is it not from the Red Sea, where the enemies of the spiritual Israel were signally overthrown by the arm of the Almighty? Is it not from Gethsemane and Golgotha, where he triumphed over principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly? Thus was bruised the head of the serpent; thus was the prey taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered; thus was peace made by the blood of the cross. And he stood among the myrtle-trees. These, my brethren, are the trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. Under the influence of the heavenly dew their branches spread, and they cast forth their roots as Lebanon. (Hosea 14:5-9) Supported by the grace, power, and faithfulness of Jehovah, they flourish in unfading verdure, and yield the sweetest fragrance, through the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost. The true church, the children of God on earth, are here represented. They are as the lovely myrtle, wherewith the King of kings entwines a wreath of glory for his head, as he says by his prophet, thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal

diadem in the hand of thy God." (Isaiah 62:3.) For they are " predestined by Jesus Christ to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made them accepted in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:5-6.) And as branches of myrtle were emblematic of joy among the Jews, and were borne with songs of gladness before the bridegroom; so do the children of God cause joy to abound in the kingdom of heaven. God himself rejoices over them. (Isaiah 62:5.) For thus saith the Lord, " Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate, but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, (that is, my delight is in her,) and thy land Beulah, (or, married) for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." (Isaiah 62:4.) And where grew the myrtle-trees? " In the bottom;" that is, in a low ground. In such a situation they flourish to the greatest advantage: their leaves assume the richest verdure, and there they yield the sweetest fragrance. And so it is in spiritual things. In the valley of humiliation and lowliness of mind, of self-renunciation and poverty of spirit, there will you find the most rapid growth, the greatest conformity to the will of God, the most perfect transformation into the likeness of Him who calls us into the valley, that he may teach us heavenly wisdom, and confer upon us the blessing of peace. " At that time Jesus answered, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so. Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matthew 11:25-26; Matthew 11:28-29.) The man stood between the myrtle-trees. So Christ abides with his church. He " dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'' (Isaiah 57:15.) He is in the midst of his church and people to employ them as seemeth good unto him, and to protect them by his power. " Yea," exclaims the prophet Zephaniah, " the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17) And behold, " behind him were there red horses speckled and white." And what are these? Our prophet himself made the same inquiry, and has recorded the answer. " The man that stood among the myrtle-trees answered and said, These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth." (Zechariah 1:10.) Are they not then the hosts of Mahanaim, ministering spirits " sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation!" May they not also be regarded as the perfections of the Godhead, which surround us for our comfort and deliverance, His grace, His truth, His mercy, His almighty power? or as the precious promises, resting on which, neither the Red Sea, which seems to shut us in, and keep us in the power of the enemy, nor the cloud-capped mountains, with their inaccessible summits, nor the deepest gulfs yawning at our feet, nor the darkest night, with all its fearful horrors, can move us or obstruct us in our onward progress toward the heavenly Zion! The promises, the attributes, and the angelic messengers of Jehovah, these ever accompany him who was seen among the myrtle-trees, and wherever he is, there are also the hosts of God around him; and wherever Christ gains admittance into a house or heart, the glory of the Lord filleth the same.

This, then, was the vision of Zechariah, which he saw by the night to his comfort concerning Jerusalem, and it is a personification of truth. Even now may it be seen among us. Think of this heavenly vision; think of it as you lie upon your bed at night, whenever care spreads her heavy wing over you, and Satan hurls against you his fiery darts; think of it by day, as often as darkness pervades your soul; and when all sense and feeling are gone, lift up the eye of faith, and behold that which was seen by Zechariah by the night, and be comforted.

I well know, that in every affliction and distress of the beloved children of God in these days, as well as in former times. He is near at hand to comfort and to bless them. Only take courage, brethren, be comforted; before another sun has set, many, perhaps, who now think that the Lord hath forsaken them, and their God hath forgotten them, ashamed of their unbelief, will exclaim with Jacob, " Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not!" Many such, perhaps, may have their eyes opened, as the servant of Elijah, to behold the mountain covered with chariots of fire and horses of fire, and feel constrained to cry aloud with the prophet. My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." But yet, beloved brethren, if this consolation should be absent, and if darkness should for a time be left to hang over you, then may God grant, in his mercy, that you may at least be enabled to exclaim with Zechariah, at such a time and under such circumstances, I saw by the night, and behold! behold! ■

Amen.

Chapter 8

01.5. Spiritual Decline and Recovery

Chapter 5 SPIRITUAL DECLINE AND RECOVERY. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." - Hebrews 5:4-6.

These, my brethren, are well known and important words, of which I would speak on the present occasion. And who is there among you, that is not aware of the reason why they are so well known, and of their deep importance?

Many of you are, no doubt, curious to learn how the passage before us will be now treated. But you are greatly mistaken, my brethren, if you imagine that I have selected this text, for the purpose of displaying my skill and wisdom. No; for that would very ill accord with my present design, and justly expose me to censure. Nor let any one suppose, that it is my intention to afford new matter for speculation at home, or that I mean to pamper the lust of disputation and controversy, and pour oil into the fire of party disquisition. The former is indeed superfluous; for so much of nice distinction and refinement, so many vain and fruitless inquiries every where abound, that here and there the realities of life seem to be almost overlooked and forgotten. And as to the latter, there is no need that the fire of conflicting opinions should burn still brighter among us, rather than smolder beneath its expiring ashes. And how could I, by fanning such a flame, forward the cause of truth, or remain consistent with myself, or with the sentiments which I have recently advanced on unity? No, no; my design is far otherwise. For since this portion of Scripture, as well as every other, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works ■ (2 Timothy 3:16-17) ■ And since it appears to me especially suitable for a day such as this, when many weary and heavy laden souls, oppressed under a sense of sin; many sons and daughters, who in a state of spiritual declension, having erred and strayed like lost sheep, stand apart, and deem themselves guilty of covenant breaking, and would gladly, if it might be, renew their covenant with God ■ I have, therefore, selected the words before us, looking upwards in hope that the Lord may enable me, by his grace, to speak a word in season to him that is weary. O may it appear that not I only have chosen this passage; but that He, in whose name I speak, has appointed it for our present consideration, and will bless it to the edification of many.

There are three points in this passage of Scripture which demand our attention.

1. The persons who are spoken of.

2. The fall of which they are susceptible.

3. The warning which is given them.

1. THE PERSONS OF WHOM THE APOSTLE SPEAKS. Are they the children of God or not? ■ A most important inquiry, and one which has caused many a head to throb, many a heart to ache!

There are some, as you are aware, who suppose St. Paul to refer, in this passage, not to such as have been born of the Spirit; but to persons who have possessed what has been termed a temporary faith ■ to men in whose emotions, expressions, and desires there appears to have been a kind of change, but who have not been really renewed and converted, and are, therefore, to be regarded as of the number of " those that are without." This interpretation is far fetched, and evidently arises from an over anxiety to uphold, by our text, one of the most consolatory and precious doctrines of our holy faith; namely, the doctrine of free grace and final perseverance. But whether such anxious solicitude be well founded or not, it is in no case right, nor in accordance with the truth, for men to accommodate the word of God to their own peculiar systems, and wrest and pervert it after their own pleasure. This cannot be called, to " tremble at God's word.'' (Isaiah 66:2) The word may bear rule and our systems be in subjection, but not the reverse.

St, Paul speaks of the children of God. Of the children of God? you exclaim; and can they fall from grace, can they perish out of the right way, can they in the end be lost? Have patience, brethren; do not forestall that which in due course will come before you. Every part of our subject shall receive its distinct and separate investigation. I will first of all prove to you, that St. Paul does speak of the children of God.

You will observe, that the Apostle describes the persons he has in view by various characteristics, which plainly indicate that they are partakers of spiritual life. We will consider these marks in due order. And do you, my Christian brethren, as we proceed in the inquiry, institute a close and searching self-examination, and see whether you do not discover in yourselves these signs and seals of the true Israel. The first part of the description which the apostle gives of the persons to whom he refers is, that they were once enlightened. Light is conveyed by various means in the natural world, as by the reflected brightness of the moon, the brilliant ray of the sun, the burning of a torch or taper. And so it is also in spiritual things.

There are some who understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and attract the attention of their fellowmen and command their admiration, but their acquirements have been made by human instrumentality, or by the exertion of their natural powers. Their light is not immediately from heaven. It is the light of the moon, which neither warms nor fructifies, which neither restores the dead to life, nor makes the withered shrub again to flourish. A man may be thus enlightened and yet as far from the kingdom of God and his righteousnesses, as the poor benighted heathen.

There are others who appear to be in a somewhat better state. They possess light, accompanied by a certain degree of warmth. These are susceptible and easily excited souls, who, when they speak of Christ and His salvation, and the riches of his grace, or when they hear them described or discoursed of, are conscious of certain pleasing mental sensations and emotions, and also under such circumstances are penetrated by the thought, that these things must indeed be realities, and perhaps even give honour to the gospel, and so partake, in some degree, of the stream of living water, which flows through the church of God; but shortly their position being altered, and the influence which is made to bear upon them being different, their feelings and affections are changed with their new position, and " their goodness, like the morning cloud and early dew, soon passes away." " The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the

lust of other things, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful," or " persecution and affliction arising, because of the word, by and by they are offended."

These are the foolish virgins who have no oil in their vessels with their lamps. The source of their light is soon exhausted, and they are again enveloped in darkness. Neither these, nor the others mentioned above, are, in the language of Scripture, said to be enlightened; for this description belongs only to those who have received their light, not by secondary or more remote means of communication, as from the moon, which conveys but a reflected brightness, or the flame of an expiring lamp; but they are enlightened by the immediate rays of the " Sun of Righteousness, which arises upon them with healing in his wings," which " shines into their heart, and gives them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus." They hear the cry, " Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." They hear and obey. " Once they were darkness, but now are they light in the Lord," even to the inmost recesses of their souls. They not only see their misery, but also feel it, and like Saul, on his way to Damascus, are stricken to the ground. When so enlightened, we are no longer satisfied with theory and speculation, but our knowledge is intimately connected with the life and practice, and our tongue is loosened. From the depth of our souls, the cry bursts forth, " What shall I do to be saved? " The Saviour is not only known, but also loved and revered. ’ To us who believe, he is precious," and we long to experience more and more of his quickening power. A thorough and entire change has taken place. The heart and life testify the reality of our religion. The fruits of righteousness are brought forth to the praise and glory of God. The work of the Spirit of God is apparent. " Old things are passed away, and behold, all things have become new." Here assuredly a work of grace is manifest. And what is the second mark by which the individuals referred to in the text are distinguished? They have tasted of the heavenly gift. There is also another characteristic of the people of God. It is that of which our Lord spoke to the woman of Samaria, " If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water: " (John 4:10.) It is that for which St. Paul gave thanks in writing to the Corinthians; " Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." (2 Corinthians 9:15.) Christ himself is the heavenly-gift. And can this gift be "tasted,’’ that is, partaken of, as " the bread of God, which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world; " be received by faith in his name, and with the delight of a pardoned sinner; be enjoyed as his own, and yet the man be not a partaker of saving grace? (Acts 3:16.) No, no; this description belongs not to the natural man. I do not say, that we may not know something of Christ, that we may not make a flaming profession, with no small degree of self-satisfaction, that we may not be moved by some of the gracious acts of the Lord, and feel a species of pleasure in the contemplation of the glories of his Person ■ I do not say, that this may not take place without our being in reality the children of God, partakers of a new and divine nature. But, to receive the whole gift of Christ himself, in all his offices, as the Atonement, the Saviour of the lost; to enjoy Him in the soul with lively confidence as the Saviour from death, as the bread of life ■ this, brethren, is the experience of God’s dear children, for it manifests a sense of need, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and many other things which undoubtedly belong to such as have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, and who know the blessedness of those that trust in Him. The persons under consideration are further described as having been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, an expression, I conceive, which admits of no doubt as to its import. For, observe, the apostle does not say that the Spirit has knocked at the door of their hearts, soliciting admittance, but he expressly declares that they were

made partakers of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God dwells within them. He enlightens their understandings, elevates their affections, and rules in their hearts. He is their teacher and comforter, which the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. He moves them to prayer, and makes intercession within them with groanings which cannot be uttered. He lifts up their souls to the high praises of their God. He carries on the conflict within them against the flesh, with its affections and lusts, which they are thus enabled to mortify. He makes them more than conquerors over every enemy, through him that hath loved them. In one word, he glorifies the Saviour, taking of the things of Jesus, and showing them unto his people, sanctifying and sealing them unto the day of redemption, and making them meet for the kingdom of heaven. Thus have they been made partakers of the Holy Ghost. They have drank into one and the same Spirit, who carries on a work of grace within them, by which God is glorified. This is the meaning of St. Paul; who then can doubt that he referred to such as are really the people of God? And that we may know for a certainty that he speaks of those who have received the Holy Ghost as the means and pledge of their salvation, and the earnest of their inheritance, he further adds, and have tasted the good word of God. They know by their own experience that the word of God is good, that, under all the varying circumstances of life, it is near us, to counsel, and direct, to administer its friendly aid, whether of light or consolation. They can say with David, " How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." (Psalms 119:103.) And again, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." (Psalms 119:72.) To taste the good word of God can be the portion only of those that have fellowship with the Holy Ghost, who inspired the word, and applies it to the hearts and consciences of believers ■ who unfolds its hidden meaning, and makes it effectual, " for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17.) They who taste the good word of God must assuredly belong to His family. And now we come to their last distinguishing characteristic. They have tasted " the powers of the world to come.’ And here, brethren, you may give full scope to your imagination. Think of the abundant effusions of grace from on high, by which the child of God is enabled to overcome this world, and the prince thereof; think of the lively foretaste of everlasting joys, and a transporting anticipation of heavenly blessedness; think of the vision of the things that shall be hereafter, the second advent of the Son of God, in power and majesty unspeakable; think of the assured expectation, the animating hope, the joyous realization of the believer, to be ever with the Lord; think of the victory, the exultation, the triumph, the everlasting jubilee, when death, and hell, and sin, and every enemy, shall be put under our feet, and sorrow and sighing, and all the evils of mortality, shall flee away; think of these things, and of whatever else of glory and of beauty the most lively imagination can possibly portray; and all ■ all will fall infinitely short of that which is conveyed by the expression of the apostle, " to taste of the powers of the world to come." And need I inquire whether they are the children of God, or not, to whom these things belong?

O that every one of you, brethren, could trace these marks of the true believer in yourselves. We should not hesitate a moment longer to pronounce you " the blessed of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." We should stand upon the mountain with him " which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, " and should take up his parable and say, " How goodly are thy tents, Jacob, and thy tabernacles, Israel. As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign-aloes, which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters. Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." (Numbers

24:5-9.) 2. THE FALLING AWAY OF WHICH THE CHILDREN OF GOD ARE SUSCEPTIBLE

St. Paul speaks of the children of God, and not, indeed, of mere novices and babes in spiritual things, but of those who have made considerable progress in the way to heaven; and he refers to the fall, of which they are susceptible; " if they shall fall away." Fall away? Yes, brethren, that is what he says, and nothing else. And who is there that ought not carefully and earnestly to lay it to heart? For here yawns an abyss beneath our feet, which threatens to swallow up two of the most cherished tenets of our holy faith, and with them our dearest comforts; yea, the whole of our rest and peace ■ I mean the doctrines of free and unmerited grace and favour, and of our perfect safety under the protection of Jehovah; so that we " shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck us out of his hands." (John 10:28) For, in truth, the thought that our salvation is entirely dependent on our own power, is the grave of peace, and the source of never-ending anxiety. But is it really said that we may fall away? Has not the word some other signification? No, dear brethren; none whatever. Nor does it alter the case that St. Paul, instead of expressly stating, in so many words, the possibility of such an event, only supposes it, " if they shall fall away," as though he would intimate, this, indeed, never can fee. He has no such intention. His meaning is obvious; that the falling away of the children of God is possible. It is not, indeed, of frequent occurrence, but it may take place.

Yet every fall is not a falling away ■ a forgetfulness of Christ, and turning away from following him. For the word of God makes a distinction between a fall and falling away. Of the former, occasioned by the weakness and infirmity of our nature, we read in Proverbs, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." (Proverbs 24:16) Of this, which is frequently the means of great and special benefits to our souls, the apostle does not speak. In this matter let us judge no man, for he is judged of the Lord. (Colossians 2:16) And " who art thou that judgeth another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall he holden up; for God is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:4) It is not, however, with the fall of the children of God that we have now to do, but with their falling away; and our subject demands a close and patient investigation.

Let me refer you to Galatians 5:4. The persons whom the apostle addresses he characterizes as really awakened, as truly converted unto God, as having run well in the path of righteousness, and enjoyed the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free; and yet he tells them that Christ is become of no effect unto them; that they are fallen from grace. From grace, you will observe, is his expression, not out of a state of grace. And I would remark, by the way, that this latter expression, or any thing equivalent to it, I have never found in the word of God. In what, then, consisted the falling away of these Galatians? It was in this, my brethren, as you will perceive by the context, that they had departed from a state of Gospel liberty, and become entangled again with the yoke of the Law. They no longer regarded themselves as mere recipients of grace, which wrought in them mightily, but imagined that they were themselves possessed of power, of which they had only to make use; rejecting the thought that they were but poor sinners, who must be saved only through the merits and righteousness of another, they supposed they could attain life by their own good works and deservings. They had lost the lively sense of their weakness and unprofitalbleness, and instead of abiding under the cross, and living on grace and mercy, they had adopted the miserable expedient of being their own saviors, and asking in their own name, whilst they rejected the name and the advocacy of the only Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus: and instead of being judged and condemned in their own consciences, on account of

their sins, and resorting with earnest importunity to a throne of grace, and fountain of mercy, that they might wash their robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, they sought to heal their infirmities, and by legal observances to set up a righteousness of their own, and to establish a claim upon God by some fancied worthiness which their own hearts devised, and their own hands effected. So that St. Paul felt constrained to say to them, " O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain?" (Galatians 3:1-4.) " Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you." (Galatians 5:7-8.) This was a falling away ■ a falling from grace ■ a departure from the path of the child of God, to walk in that of the self-righteous natural man. It was a renunciation of Christ; a silent, but not the less significant declaration, that they needed Him not; that they would not have Him to rule over them. This was a treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and doing despite unto the Spirit of Grace. (Hebrews 10:29.) And, therefore, St. Paul justly charges them, in my text, with crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame. See here, my brethren, the falling away of the true Christian, and such, alas! as is sometimes to be seen in our own days. But there is a falling away which is still worse than this, not merely from grace to the law, but from God to idols: from the kingdom of heaven to the world, and from the path of the Spirit and of light to that of the flesh and darkness. It is scarcely to be believed, and yet we have manifest proof of its reality.

You think, perhaps, that I allude to David at a certain period of his life. No, brethren: David’s was a fall, not a falling away. But look at Solomon, that beloved servant of God, and accompany him through his whole course of life; an impression of dread and alarm must necessarily come over you. Behold the glowing writer of the Canticles, the master of wisdom in proverbs, the man full of faith and zeal ■ O, how greatly has he fallen ! His queens and concubines have enslaved and perverted his heart, and he bows down before the idols of the surrounding nations. He forsakes the Lord, and worships Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Milcom, the god of the children of Ammon. (1 Kings 11:33.) He does that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, and builds idol-temples and altars, and goes with his wives to the high places to bum incense and offer sacrifices to Moloch. Twice did the Lord appear unto him, commanding him not to walk after other gods, but he regarded not the voice of warning; so that at length the Lord came against him with the lightning of his displeasure, and with a louder and more alarming call. And alas! Have not some of the children of God been guilty of a similar defection? Are there not those to whom the world was once crucified, that have gone back unto the world ■ have not some who, for a long time, have been serving the Lord, now sunk into their former sinful state of life, which they had apparently for ever forsaken, and returned like the sow that was washed, to their wallowing in the mire?

Perhaps, there are some such unhappy ones among ourselves ■ some who formerly clave unto the Lord; but the bond is now broken and dishonored! Who once stood beneath the cross weeping, but now themselves crucify the Saviour; who once were ranked with the humble penitents of the Scripture, with Peter, with the thief on the cross, and Mary Magdalene, but now

they shed not a tear for their sins, and their hearts are as insensible as steel or iron; who once delighted in singing the songs of Zion, the praises of the Lamb, but now have forgotten the Lamb and his precious blood, and mingle in the pleasures and occupations of the world and of Belial; who once were the planting of the Lord to his honour and glory, but now are like the withered tree in the forest, dried up and bare, without blossoms, sap, or fruit. Alas! perhaps such are to be found, even in our own congregation; so that we have not far to go to seek for them. And, if it, indeed, be thus, then we point at such among us, and say, " Behold in these is the proof that the falling away of the children of God is possible."

3. THE WARNING. And now, ye who have fallen away, hear the warning which is given you; hearken to the voice of thunder which proceeds from the mouth of the apostle; " It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." how terribly do these words sound! They seem almost like that fearful sentence, " Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) They do not, however, denounce a sentence of condemnation, but forcibly set before us how painful, how difficult, must be the restoration of those, who, having been rooted and grounded in the faith, and blessed with the sweetest manifestations of love from God, have afterwards relapsed into sin. Whoever, therefore, are guilty of such sin, may well fear and tremble. The word " impossible," in our text, is calculated to fill them with horror and alarm. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. O, watch and pray, and abide under the shadow of the cross. There lay you down to rest; there awake in the morning. Let that be the spot of your daily employments, the scene of your active and careful preparation for eternity. There wait for the coming of the Lord; there draw your last sigh; then are ye safe.

I perceive an intense anxiety among you, my brethren, and many a heart heaves a heavy sigh. I think I am not mistaken. And what is the cause! Ah, I know it well. Some of you deem yourselves guilty of this sin, and the word " impossible," as with the weight of a mountain, presses down your souls. Indeed, brethren, I feel acutely for you; I mourn over your case. But have you really fallen away? Yes, you think; yes, we have indeed. And are you distressed on account of it? Alas! you exclaim, deeply, deeply distressed. And do you desire to be restored? O, most earnestly, is your cry; but it is in vain. We are lost for ever. We are unfaithful; we are base sinners; we have crucified the Lord of glory. It is impossible, impossible. This is the language of your soul. But stop: we know enough to say to you. Take courage; be not dismayed. Your apprehensions are not well grounded. For you there is nothing but comfort in our text. Comfort? Yes, brethren, comfort; for observe what the apostle says. It is this; that it is impossible " to renew them again unto repentance." But you, I conceive, are renewed unto, repentance; for what else is this your anxiety and trembling apprehension? what else are these your sighs, and cries, and tears, and this judging of yourself before the Lord? what are these but repentance and contrition of heart! There is no need, therefore, for you to number yourselves among those that have fallen away. Look at this obvious conclusion, consider its truth, and be comforted. In the name of God and his word I say, ye are in a state of grace. Is it not so, beloved, that you who are affected by overmuch sorrow on this account, may hope in God’s mercy! But many among us still continue oppressed with anxiety. That word " impossible " presses down their souls as an intolerable burden, perhaps less on their own account

than on that of others. A father mourns over his fallen son; a brother thinks of his brother that has grievously gone astray; a friend calls to mind his friend who is under spiritual declension; and, alas! the word " impossible " so affects their souls, that they gaze, as it were, into the bottomless pit, and behold their brother, son, or friend, given a prey to the merciless, the everlasting flames.

Wherewith can we speak peace to these, or what can we say to those whom we may have robbed of the delightful feeling of their security, or whose confidence we have shaken? The latter we would exhort to be the more diligent in watching and prayer; and to the former we would say, if those beloved ones, whose falling away you mourn, were the children of God, they are not lost. God will not cast away His people; and though your eyes and mine may not perceive it, though they themselves may scarcely be conscious of it, the loving-kindness of the Lord is not utterly taken away from them, (Psalms 89:33) the Holy Ghost has not forsaken them, for the promise made to the People of God is, that He shall abide with them for ever. (John 14:16) The word of God cannot be at variance with itself, nor are we at liberty to take a partial view of divine truth, and to rest upon one portion to the neglect of another. That which our Lord says in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, still holds good; " My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand;" (John 10:27-29.) And also in the sixth chapter, " All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." (John 10:37-39) And that which the Holy Ghost says in our text is not opposed to these great truths. This I must briefly show you. And let me call your attention to the exact wording of the text. It is not said that it is impossible for them to be renewed again, but it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. You can easily appreciate the difference between the two modes of expression. A physician may say respecting a patient who is dangerously ill, " it is impossible to restore him," by which expression he would intimate that it is a case beyond the power of his skill to remedy. Should he presume to say that it is impossible for the man to be restored to health, he would say too much; for God, who possesses all power, can raise up and restore, even from the gates of death. In like manner, the apostle, in the expression before us, does not deny that there is any possibility of recovery, but he asserts that the means which at other times are made use of for the spiritual good of men, namely, the admonitions of love, the voice of warning, and the preaching of the word, are to those, who have fallen away, unavailing. The earnest call to repentance, the remonstrances of friends, and the promises and threatening of Scripture, fall upon these souls as dew upon the beaten path, and as rain upon the hard stone.

When, therefore, St. Paul speaks here of impossibility, we must regard him as having in view the means which are usually blessed in the awakening of sinners, " the word and doctrine," in the administration of which he was diligent, as the servant of Christ, but that he did not intend us to understand that God himself could not bring back one who was guilty of spiritual declension. No, brethren. The word which excites so much alarm is to be understood precisely in that sense in which it is explained in the tenth chapter of St. Mark’s gospel. Our Lord there says, " It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And when the disciples were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, who then can

be saved? Jesus looked upon them, and said, " With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:25-27.) But why does not St. Paul make a similar express reservation? He would warn us against security and falling away, and therefore he uses strong language. But he is not at the same time unmindful of the weak and timid among the flock of Christ: and that he might not make the heart of him sad whom God hath not made sad, he more than once, in the immediate context, intimates that with God there is no impossibility to renew again to repentance his beloved children who may have fallen away. And first, he does so in the third verse. He feared that some whom he addressed had fallen away, and gave them distinctly to understand it. He was therefore apprehensive lest his proclaiming the great mysteries of the gospel of which he desired to treat should be of no avail, that his words should fall as seed upon a soil that is utterly barren and fruitless. And yet he adds, that it was his wish to preach these great doctrines to them, and this will he do, he says, if God permit. But Paul knew that their hearts were closed against him; he had just said that they had need of milk, and not of strong meat, and to be taught the first principles of the doctrines of God; but he meant that what he could not do, God could bring to pass, namely, that he could move and restore - the hardened and unfeeling souls of those who had faithlessly departed from him, and remained insensible under the preached word. This, his belief, he expresses covertly, indeed, but very significantly in the words, " This will we do, if God permit.!' But does he not openly declare, in the eighth verse, that those who have fallen away are hopelessly lost! He there compares them to the earth, which receiveth not blessing from God, and which beareth thorns and thistles. And what does he say respecting this earth? That it is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. These indeed are strong expressions, but to be nigh unto cursing does not mean to be really cursed, as to be near death is quite a different thing from being actually dead. The words, " whose end is to be burned," are unquestionably fearful, but these again are not so alarming as they appear to be. It would be far otherwise, were those who have fallen away compared to the dry stubble, which is cast into the fire to be burned. But they are said to be like the earth. And why do men in eastern countries apply fire to fields which are unproductive? Certainly not to destroy them and make them desolate, but on the contrary, to free them from weeds, to render them arable and fruitful. Even so, as the apostle intimates, does God deal with his dear children who have fallen away. They shall again be renewed to repentance, but as by fire, like the fearful judgment of dreadful visitations, like the flame of wrath and the torments of the lost, as it was with David and Solomon, and others, who have fallen away. Yes, with God nothing is impossible. Are you still dismayed, my brethren? If it is yet a matter of doubt with you, whether the everlasting covenant of God, which is well ordered in all things and sure, remains fixed and unbroken, then read the remainder of the chapter. The apostle there treats of the truth and faithfulness of God, in a way which fills the heart with gladness and rejoicing. It seems as though it were his desire to raise up and exalt to heaven those whom he had first, by the thunder of his warnings, leveled with the earth. It is impossible, he says, for God to lie. Has he once spoken to us, by the Spirit of his grace; has he really promised to us poor criminals the joys of paradise? Then may we have strong consolation! These two things ■ his oath and his once promised word ■ can never fail. In these we have at all times an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.

Behold, thus doth the apostle express himself respecting these great things. For whom is this discourse designed? For the careless and secure, in the first place; and next for those who are of little faith and fearful. To the former, it addresses the voice of warning, to excite them to watch and

pray, and abide under the cross, lest, before they are aware, they should wander far from God; for it is a fearful and a bitter thing at last, as a field, to be burned, and by such a painful process to be renewed again to repentance ■ and for the latter it is designed, as a means of confirmation and establishment in the faith, that they may be comforted and encouraged, though they may have been unfaithful, and guilty of declining from God. For the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (2 Timothy 2:19) Yes, he knoweth them that are his.

Come then, ye citizens of heaven, however tattered, and torn, and disfigured, by your long wandering from the right way ■ come to a God, reconciled to man in Christ Jesus. As long as He shall see your names written on the tablet of the covenant, he will " earnestly remember you still, (Jeremiah 31:20.) and though months and years may have passed away since you departed from him, He will, when you turn and repent, welcome you as friends, and you shall yourselves testify that you really had nothing to fear, for the love of God to his people is unchangeable. Faithful is he that hath called you, who also will do it. Let the faithfulness of God melt and subdue your soul, and so draw nigh to Him. His heart yearns over you to embrace you in love, to restore, to refresh, and comfort you. Then let them come who weep, but yet believe, For contrite sinners Jesus will receive.

Amen.

01.6. The Dew of Israel

Chapter 6 THE DEW OF ISRAEL.

" I will be as the dew unto Israel ■ that he shall flourish as the Rose." - Hosea 14:5

" Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." ■ Such are the gracious words of the Lord to his people; and the promises which he annexes to this call of mercy, and by which he allures them to himself, are sweeter than honey and the honey-comb; (Psalms 19:10.) He will heal their backslidings. He will love them freely, for his anger is turned away from them. Yea, he will be as the dew unto Israel ■ that he shall flourish as the rose. At this last promise to the spiritual Israel we will pause, to inquire into its import, and to refresh ourselves with the hidden manna which descends in this heavenly dew. (See Exodus 16:14.) Let US contemplate, 1. Christ under the similitude of the dew on Israel; and then, 2. The Church, as represented by a blooming rose.

1. CHRIST THE DEW OF ISRAEL.

I will be as the dew unto Israel. How beautiful the comparison! Many, doubtless, in this assembly, are now breathing the silent prayer ■ " 0, my Lord and Saviour, be unto me as the dew of the early dawn."

Frequent allusion is made to dew in the sacred writings. Sometimes it represents great and special benefits; " Therefore," saith the aged Patriarch to Esau, " God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth." (Genesis 27:28.) Spiritual blessings are also thus described; " The fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine, also his heavens shall drop down dew." (Deuteronomy 33:28.) The fruitfulness and quickening power of the word of God is moreover set forth by this similitude; " My speech shall distill as the dew." (Deuteronomy 32:2.) Sometimes grace is signified; "The king’s favour is as dew upon the grass." (Proverbs 19:12.) At other times, it is expressive of peace and brotherly union of spirit; " Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments. As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." (Psalms 133:1-3) The morning dew, copiously diffused over the face of nature, brilliant, from the reflected light of heaven, as diamonds of the purest water, communicating freshness to the herbage, is an apt and beautiful emblem of the children of God, ■ the converts of Zion, who are born from above, numerous as the drops of morning dew. (Psalm. ex.) The beauty of the Lord their God is upon them, and they are valued by Him as his precious jewels. (Malachi 3:17) The blessings vouchsafed to the places where they dwell, in answer to their fervent and constant prayers, descend as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the new mown grass. " The remnant of Jacob," it is said, " shall be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord." (Micah 5:7) The Holy Ghost, also, with His manifold powers, gifts, and operations, is frequently represented by the same similitude.

"Whenever the Lord is described as watering his vineyard, and causing clouds to pass over it, and sending rain from heaven; whenever we read of a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God, and refresh the wilderness and solitary place, the allusion is to the Holy Spirit, who is to the soul that which dew and rain are to the face of nature. " Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." (Isaiah 26:19.) When therefore, as in my text, the Lord thus speaks of Himself, we cannot mistake the meaning. He is Himself the dew; for he is one with the Spirit. " The Lord is that Spirit," says the apostle; and again, " We are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" or of the Lord the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18. See the marginal reading.) When Christ enters into a soul, the Spirit enters; and has fellowship with us; and so also has Christ, who is glorified in us, and gives himself to us with quickening power.

" I will be as the dew unto Israel." How deep is the condescension which is intimated by this comparison. It is as if the great design of the existence of God were the life and well-being of his people. And the same grace was manifested in the humiliation of Jesus during his sojourn upon earth. " The Son of man," said our Lord, " came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28.) And again, "I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:15.) He laid it down once upon the cross, and in another, and spiritual sense, he lays it down daily for us now. He lives for us, to make us partakers of his life, that we may live in him. The Lord of heaven and of earth, under whose feet are put all things, even He will be to us a dew ■ a refreshing shower poured upon the withered field of fallen nature; O think, brethren, of this condescension, this love. The Lord will be as a dew. This also intimates, that there is a thirsty and fainting land, which he will render fruitful. And such are we, till we have received life from on high. In vain shall we seek for any fruit in a soul, before Christ has given it life. How is the beautiful garden laid waste, the planting of the Lord within us. The fire of rebellion against God has devoured the green foliage. It is a desolation, a dry and dreary desert, where only dragons and vipers dwell ■ thoughts and desires opposed to the God of heaven. Let any one seek there for the beauteous plant of heavenly love; it is utterly destroyed. Let him search for the luxuriant growth of filial confidence, of ardent devotion, and heart-felt delight in prayer; let him ask for the fragrant but lowly floweret of humility, whether it yet blooms? for the little plant of patience, whether it now grows? for communion with God, whether it is still cherished? Let a man inquire for power, and zeal, and inclination to do the will of God; for heavenly-mindedness; for the upward soaring of the soul. ■ Alas! how have we become a wilderness! That is fulfilled in us, which is spoken of by the prophet, "Thou daughter that dost inhabit Dibon, come down from thy glory and sit in thirst." (Jeremiah 48:18) Our strength is withered away, as in the drought of summer. There is no verdure, no life in us. And should any one seek to restore the lost verdure, as long as the wonder-working dew of God is withheld, his efforts are unavailing as water poured upon the burning sand. Let a man form good resolutions; let him preach or hear the word; let him read and pray; let him retire into solitude, or seek the society of the pious; it is all to no purpose, unless the Lord be with him: it is as when the rain or dew falls upon the paving-stones of the streets. But the Lord can even of stones raise up children to Abraham. He can make the wilderness blossom as the rose.

I, saith the Lord, I will be as the dew unto Israel. ■ Blessed be God that He will be as the dew. The dew is wont to fall, in the sultry night of summer, when the fields are dry and languishing; and, in like manner, doth Jesus visit the thirsty soul. Go abroad into the fields on an early summer’s

morning. See how the dew sparkles in the valleys, how it lies upon the meadows as a sea of pearls; but none has fallen upon the lofty hills. Thus, whosoever would receive Christ must first he brought low; must, like David, cry unto God out of the Depths. (Psalms 130:1.) " Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly, but the proud he knoweth afar off.'' (Psalms 138:6) " To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word." (Isaiah 66:2.) God is wont to make a man lowly before he visits him with his quickening and refreshing power. Every mountain and hill shall be brought low before Him. The Saviour of men loves the valley of humiliation. ■ How well did He know how to bring down the pride in the woman of Samaria; " Thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." (John 4:18.) At once she was convicted of sin; and sensible of her poverty and wretchedness, she looked around for a deliverer from among the people. Then it was that Jesus said unto her, "I that speak unto thee am He;" (John 4:26.) and from that time she was renewed in the spirit of her mind, and changed both in heart and life. She was the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. And it is ever thus. The dew of God falls from above. He opens the clouds of heaven, and wherever he finds valleys and depths among the hills, empty, and helpless souls, there he sheds abroad his sacred influences. " The hungry he filleth with good things, but the rich he sendeth empty away." As Joseph was a type of Christ in his whole life, so was he also in this, that he was cast into a pit which was empty.

It is in the stillness of the night that the dew descends from heaven. "We hear no sound, we see no brightness; but in the morning it is suspended from the leaves, and we know not whence it came, nor how it was placed there. So is it also with Christ. The manner of his coming is hidden in darkness; who can lift up the veil? His approach is also, for the most part still and noiseless; not with sound and ceremony, not with visions and wondrous manifestations, not with a voice from heaven, and pomp and parade apparent to the senses. Or ever the sighing and waiting sinner is aware, He says to him. Behold, I am He. No host of angels has entered his chamber, no audible voice has been heard through his window: he has seen no vision, nor has any light from heaven shone around him, as around the shepherds on the field of Bethlehem; but within his soul he has heard the gracious announcement, " Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, for to you is born this day the Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The Spirit beareth witness with his spirit; and this is the witness that God hath given unto us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. His conscience also testifies that he has partaken of the fountain of grace opened to the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem: he knows that Christ is his Saviour. The dew has gently fallen in the calm and silent season of the night; but in what manner we know not; yet the sinner feels that it is there: and we also perceive, in the whole course of his life and conversation, that Divine grace has descended on his soul. The dew upon the tender grass is distinguished for its brightness. It reflects the light of heaven. And thus also, when Christ has found admission into our soul, amidst the deepened sense of our sinfulness, He appears glorious in our eyes; and the more close our communion with him, the more do our misery and utter helplessness become apparent. Hence the cry of the believer: " Alas! what am I, my Saviour: I daily discover more evil in my state." But thanks be to God, as the dew adorns and beautifies that on which it falls, so does Christ cover our misery with his righteousness, which is glorious like the curtains of Solomon. (Song of Solomon 1:5) There is no condemnation, saith the apostle, to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:1) And how fertilizing is this dew! It gives life to the dead soul. It makes the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose. How great is the change

which is effected, when, after a long and sultry summer’s day, the morning dawn unfolds itself, and sheds abroad its blessings upon the fields. We see nothing then faint and withered; the flowers and herbage lift up their heads; all things are adorned with beauty, as in the season of spring, and the fragrance of life is wafted through the air! But yet greater and more glorious is the change, when Christ, the dew of God, descends upon a heart, or upon a whole household, as in the case of Cornelius.

How wretched and barren the heart of man, till Christ is there. How unhappy and lifeless its condition. The world possesses all ■ the mind, the will, the affections. The thoughts are winged only toward the flesh-pots of Egypt. The desires and hopes go upon the ground, like the serpent, and eat the dust. The mouth speaks only of the gratifications and employments of time. The whole life and being of man ■ his joys and griefs, his hopes and sorrows, are estimated by this world and its vanity; his entire state is mean and groveling, without God, without light, destitute of heavenly mindedness, full of sin. Angels cannot endure such a sight.

But, behold! Salvation comes to this house. The Saviour sheds his blessings from on high. Now come and see what a change has been effected. " The glory of the Lord filleth the house." How sacred has the place become; worldly mindedness is expelled, and the gentle spirit of humility and love occupies its room, and the conversation is in heaven; earthly inclinations are dislodged, and the thoughts, wishes, and desires are now wings, wherewith to fly upward. The treasure is now elsewhere, the heart is elsewhere also. Other bread and water are now known, and other is the thirst and hunger. The man has attained another state and condition, and his language and course of life are consequently different. He is spiritual, and all things are now spiritually discerned and estimated; and his chambers are perfumed with the frankincense of prayer and praise, ascending day and night as a sweet smelling savour before the Lord. His state was before dreary, and void, and desolate, and darkness was upon the face of the deep: but the Spirit has now moved upon the face of the waters, and light has broken in, and the soul stands glorious in the bloom and beauty of the new creation. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the work of Him who says, in my text, I will be as the dew unto Israel. That he were such to all of us! But observe, my brethren, that dew, precious as it is, may become injurious to the fields. This is the case, when it falls on a cold and chilly atmosphere. Then, congealed into frost, it destroys, vegetation. And thus has Christ been unto many the savour of death unto death. So, for example, did he become to Judas a chilling frost. Of this the wintry atmosphere of opposition and obstinacy in Judas was the cause. All that Jesus did by word or example, by gentle allurements or by warnings, to gain an entrance into the heart of Judas, hardened his heart more and more, and accelerated his destruction. Christ was not the cause of this, but Judas himself. May God preserve every one of us from such a state! God forbid that that which alone can give life eternal, should in the evil atmosphere of our soul be changed into a withering frost!

O let him who has received this refreshing and fructifying gift, rejoice and give thanks to God. But some of you, perhaps, mourn the absence of the dew after which you thirst. For many days and weeks, it may be, you have not been able to perceive its sweetness, nor rejoice in its communications from on high. See that, under such circumstances, you mistake not your state. For the dew is not unfrequently withheld from the souls of God’s dear children. Then do the plants of love and peace, of confidence and joy, droop and hang down their heads. There is no life for prayer, praise, or giving of thanks. But only wait awhile. God would now show you the value of the

dew. When his hour is come He will return again to you, and give you inwardly to experience its gracious effects. And how great the joy when the treasures of heaven are poured forth after a long, sultry season! Then you first learn rightly how to estimate the mercies conferred on you, and by faith perceive and acknowledge in your own soul, that the Lord alone is as the dew unto Israel.

2. THE CHURCH A BLOOMING ROSE. As Christ represents himself in my text under the similitude of the dew, in like manner does he compare the church, and also each individual believer, to a rose. " I will be as the dew unto Israel ■ that he shall flourish as the rose." This expression is also highly significant. The rose is a lovely flower, second to none in sweetness and beauty. As the nightingale among birds, the rose is among flowers, the most eloquent in the praises of the Creator. It utters no vocal sound, nor does it rustle, as the palm of Elias, or the cedars of Lebanon, and yet it seems to be formed to give glory to its maker. Thus, too, Israel, whose seed shall live for ever, a rose in the great wilderness of man, created for God's honour and glory. " The Lord hath redeemed Jacob," saith the prophet, "and glorified Himself in Israel." (Isaiah 44:23.) And St. Paul declares, that God hath " predestined us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:5-6.) Believers are his workmanship, born of his Water and his Spirit. His is the light which enlightens them; His the grace which is made manifest in their conversation. Yes, all that is bright and lovely in their character is from God, the darkness only belongs to themselves. The Urim and Thummin, which they bear upon their breast, has been placed there by God; and the language of their hearts is, " Not unto us, Lord, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake." (Psalms 115:1.) The power of His grace is displayed in all who are born again to his honour and glory. " We have this treasure," it is said, " in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Corinthians 4:7.)

How wondrous, how mysterious, are the ways of God. For observe who are they that shall flourish as the rose. Poor, contrite sinners, who are conscious of nothing good in themselves; miserable outcasts, such as took refuge with David in the cave; weak, dispirited men by nature, who have neither power nor will of their own to make any effort ■ the lame, the blind, the destitute, who lie in the street at the threshold of His door, and live on the crumbs of bread which fall from His table. And the great and the rich, the honorable and the powerful, (namely, those who deem themselves as such) are but as weeds. A believer, however deep may have been the dye of his sins; a poor Lazarus lying in his leprosy; a publican pricked to the heart, and crying, God be merciful to me a sinner; a penitent thief upon the cross ■ Such sinners He receiveth (Luke 15:2.) From these he ordaineth praise. Such is the wonder-working power of God. But, truly, they are not saved by Him for the sake of any thing in themselves, nor for any humility or piety they may be supposed to possess; but He regards them as his own, because they are found in Christ, and are clothed with the garment of his perfect righteousness. By his grace he hath made us accepted in the Beloved. The rose has a delightful fragrance. Thus the Lord says by Ezekiel, " I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered, and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen." (Ezekiel 20:41.) And it is said, respecting the church, in the Song of Solomon, "the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." (Song of Solomon 4:11.) This reminds us of Jacob, when, by subtlety, he obtained the blessing. He clothed himself in the " goodly raiment " of Esau, and drew nigh unto his father;

(Genesis 27:15.) then, it is said, Isaac smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, " See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." (Genesis 27:27.) And this is it with regard to ourselves. We are as a sweet savour unto the Lord, only when clothed in the beautiful garments of our elder brother; we are accepted in the Beloved. The rose is red; in this respect also is it an emblem of the spiritual Israel. St. Paul speaks, in the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, of our " boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus;" and again, in the twelfth chapter, he makes mention of " the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." As Moses sprinkled all the people with the blood of the sacrifice, so are the children of God sprinkled with the blood of Christ, their passover, that the destroying angel may not touch them. (Hebrews 9:19; Hebrews 9:23; 1 Peter 1:3) Their faith looks to His atoning blood. " The shield of the mighty men is made red," saith the prophet Nahum 2:3 This may be regarded as applying to the shield of faith. Their hope springs out of the obedience of the Saviour, his obedience unto death. Their prayers and praises are sprinkled with his blood, for thus only do they draw nigh unto God. The fountain of their love is the bleeding cross. They would glory in nothing else, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He is their all and in all. All their works are done in the believing apprehension of the blood of the cross. Thus do they possess the colour as well as the fragrance of the rose. When a rose has lost its lovely hue, it is a sign that it is hastening to decay. This holds good also with reference to the Christian. If he cease to cry, with David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow;" (Psalms 51:7.) if he neglect to have recourse to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness; if he begin to think lightly of the offering of the Mediator, and venture without it to approach the Father, it is an evil token■ a sign that the worm of pride is gnawing at the root. The more rich the coloring, the greater is the indication of life; the more indispensable appears to us the blood of the covenant, the better is the state of our soul. The rose is seldom without a thorn. And what says the bridegroom in the Song of Solomon? " As the rose among the thorns so is my beloved." But what are the thorns? They are the many afflictions, both external and with-in, to which the children of God are subjected in this world. And thus must it needs be. They are hedged in, that they may not wander out of the right way, and that they may be protected from many dangers. Without his sufferings the graces of Lazarus would not have shone forth so brightly; and Paul, without a thorn in his flesh would have been exalted above measure. Whenever the church of God has been subjected to severe persecution, the beauty of the Lord has been most upon her, and her comeliness unfolded to the view. And now observe, in the last place, the source whence the rose derives its loveliness and growth. It toils not, neither does it spin, but it waves gently in the sun-beam, and opens its cup to the dew of the early dawn; thence its fragrance and beauty, in which it surpasses every flower of the field. Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of them. Here do we receive instruction. Our toils and labours are of no avail: we cannot change and renew ourselves. In this consists our life; that we walk in the light of Jacob; that the day-star from on high visits us; that we "lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help;" (Psalms 121:1.) that we repair to no fountain but that which is opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, (Zechariah 13:1.) and daily and hourly draw from thence living water. (John 4:10.) Happy are they who have no other care than every moment to abide under the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and be moistened with the dew which distills from heaven. Happy are they whose eyes rest continually on the good Shepherd, that he may give them their portion of meat in due season; that he may open his hand and satisfy them with good things. They shall never be

permitted to want. Their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure.

Wouldst thou, Israel, flourish and blossom as the rose? Unfold thine heart under a deep sense of thy need to Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, and to the dew of heaven which descends gently from on high. So wilt thou be, as the rose in the season of spring, lovely, fresh, and fragrant; and in thy words and actions, in thy prayers and praises, and thy holy conversation, will men recognize the brightness and the glory of the heavenly dew.

O come, then. Lord and Saviour, be unto us as the dew! On all those who are still as withered plants, and, continuing such, must at length be cast into the fire and burned, let the power of thy Spirit be manifest, as once on the rod of Aaron, which though dry and lifeless, yet, in one night, "brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." (Numbers 17:8.) May we all flourish as the rose. And whenever Thou shalt come to us to call a soul hence to thy eternal mansions, may it be said in heaven, " Behold, my Beloved is gone down into his garden to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather roses." (Song of Solomon 6:2.)

Amen.

01.7. The Saviour's Joy

Chapter 7 THE SAVIOUR’S JOY A SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.

"Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." - Proverbs 8:31.

There can be no great difficulty in finding the solution of this mysterious subject. The chapter from which our text is taken furnishes it amply. It shows us plainly that the allusion is to essential Wisdom, or the Son of God. Our Lord bears, in many passages of Scripture, the name of ’Wisdom." He says of himself, (Matthew 11:19,) Wisdom is justified of her children; " and again, (Luke 11:49.) " Therefore, also, said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles." And Paul declares, that " God hath made Christ unto us Wisdom." (1 Corinthians 1:30.) In our text, also, something is stated respecting Christ, the Wisdom of God, which, especially in the light of the joyous season of the nativity, it is not difficult to understand. Let us proceed, then, to consider the subject thus brought before us. And first let us observe the latter clause of our text.

1. " MY DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN."

O how bright and rich the meaning which flashes from these words upon our minds. They are like a costly jewel, which, however you may turn and examine it, is on all sides beautiful, and ever sends forth new rays of life and lovely coloring. Our Lord here informs us, that He had delights ■ peculiar and special enjoyments. And where had He these delights? Where else, you say, than where the tree of life flourishes, and the streams of living water flow; (Revelation 22:1-2.) where the crown of glory encircles his brow, and ten thousand times ten thousand, with their golden harps, stand around his throne. (Revelation 14:2.) But no; his heart is elsewhere; " My delights were with the sons of men." You think, then, that he speaks of the beginning of time, and the last day of the creation. Aye, then was it indeed good to dwell among men; for it was pleasant to walk amidst the trees of Eden, when the inhabitants of the earth were pure and undefiled. (Genesis 2:8.) Nor yet, brethren, is this the tune of which our Lord speaks; but he alludes to a period when all the foundations of the earth were out of coarse; (Psalms 82:5.) when the imagination of man’s heart was only evil from his youth, (Genesis 8:21.) and the whole human race dead in trespasses and sins, (Ephesians 2:1.) tied and bound by the fetters of the wicked one, (2 Timothy 2:26.) and, bending under the wrath and curse of the Almighty, (Ephesians 2:3.) had sunk in deep mire, where there was no standing, (Psalms 69:2.) and the pit was about to swallow them up. (Psalms 69:15.) Well, therefore may we be astonished that, under such circumstances, the Lord of Glory should say, " My delights were with the sons of men."

" My delights " ■ What, then, is implied in this expression? Many things, beloved; and, in the first place, that which, from the beginning, was His chief joy, His highest and most exalted pleasure. And what was that? It was Jesus himself; for he alone is lovely, and worthy to be loved; and every thing else is beautiful, only so far as it partakes of his beauty, and is derived from him. (Ezekiel 16:14.) For he is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. (Song of Solomon 5:16.)

The rays of his own perfections delighted his eyes. And these delights " were with the sons of men." Yes, where else should they be! ■ With the angels, perhaps? They have their own glory, but the glory of Christ is among sinners. Wonderful as it may appear, it is, nevertheless, a reality; and still more wonderful that it is so. He has disrobed himself of his kingly purple, (Php 2:7.) and given it to his flock. (Revelation 1:6.) He would not retain His white linen for himself alone, but presented it to his bride, (Revelation 6:11; Revelation 7:14.) for her beautiful garments; (Isaiah 52:1.) he has decorated the "worm Jacob" (Isaiah 41:14.) with His splendid attire, with His jewels, and chain, and crown. (Ezekiel 16:10-13; James 1:12.)

How, indeed, could we have such confidence, if His righteousness did not cover our sins? How could we dare to lift up our eyes to Him, before whom the heavens are not clean, if we did not know that we are clothed with the purity of the most pure, and with the holiness of the alone holy? How could we, who are as weak as bruised reeds, with so much boldness, encounter the devil and all the powers of darkness, were we not assured that we are enrolled among the kingly hosts of the Saviour? How could we calmly anticipate the fiery tempest of coming judgment, were we not, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot enveloped with His perfect obedience? (Romans 5:19,) and could we not draw near to God, relying on His wisdom. His love, His glory ■ as if it were our own?

There are many, perhaps, who may think that to be arrayed in the merit of another, and to shine in borrowed light, is altogether easy. It may be; and yet how few are content to be saved in this way ■ the only way of salvation. This privilege is, however, ours. Father, says our blessed Saviour, briefly, but in words which cannot be misunderstood, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." (John 17:22.) As the great delight of the Lord Jesus is in his own perfections, so is the pleasure not less which he derives from the operations of his hands. "The Lord," says David, " shall rejoice in his works." (Psalms 104:31.) But where are his works manifested? ■ with the devils in hell? God forbid. Their state has been determined by themselves; their condition is the result of their own unhallowed devices. ■ With the angels in heaven? By no means. The crown has not fallen from their head, nor has the lustre of their original glory been sullied. ■ With the virtuous and righteous according to the flesh? Far otherwise. They have acquired their fancied goodness of themselves, and must depend on themselves for its preservation. ■

But, where a publican strikes upon his breast, " God be merciful to me a sinner," and a Bartimeus cries out by the way-side, " Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me; " where a woman of Canaan speaks of herself as a dog desiring the crumbs under the table, and a poor Magdalene would weep day and night at the feet of Jesus; where a Paul exults in that he has obtained mercy, and a Peter professes with trembling lips, " Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,'' and a Job declares, " Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" ■ Behold! where such things come to pass, and similar emotions are manifested; where stony hearts are made as potter's clay in the hand of God, and brazen brows become as wax, that he may impress his mark upon them; and glassy eyes are changed into a gushing fountain, the waters whereof flow towards the East; where the righteous begin to rejoice over the ruin of their righteousness, (Isaiah 64:6; Php 3:8-9.) and the wise over the destruction of their wisdom; (Jeremiah 9:23-24.) where poor sinners acquire a heart to love Him, and the workers of iniquity are changed, and with joyful lips are enabled, before these accusers, to make mention of Christ as their Advocate, and Spiritual Head ■ there, there beloved brethren, is his work, and where his work is, there is his delight. Thus are his delights with the sons

of men, and especially with his poor penitents. On them his eyes rest with pleasure. That which a beautiful prospect is to a lover of nature, or an exquisite painting to the admirer of the arts; the same is the new creature in a sinner to our Lord and Saviour, He is never weary of beholding it, for it is the workmanship of his hands. Have we now seen the full meaning of the first words under consideration? No, brethren; more is contained in them. The Lord expresses himself with brevity; but such is his ordinary method, to say much in a few words, whilst we are wont, with many words, to say but little. ' My delights," he says, " were with the sons of men;" but he withholds one word, viz. " to dwell." And why does he withhold it? Is he ashamed to give expression to all his love towards poor sinners? No; you know not our Saviour. What does Paul declare concerning him? " He is not ashamed," he says, " to call us brethren." Nor is he ashamed to dwell among us, for that is his delight; "For thus saith the high and lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isaiah 57:15.)

But, blessed Saviour, how can thy pleasure be in that world which is the scene of thy greatest displeasure? How canst thou delight to dwell where no man seeks his delight in thee? ■ no man, certainly, of himself ■ and how canst thou rejoice in those who cannot but distress and grieve thee? It must, however, be so; for he again repeats, " My delights were with the sons of men." And that this is not a transient emotion, but a deeply rooted and eternal affection, hundreds and thousands of years without intermission, from the beginning of the world to this very day, abundantly declare. For consider, the tender concern which a God of love manifested towards man before He had yet created him; for He called not into being in a moment this lord of creation by a word of his mouth and an act of power, as he did all other creatures; but as a potter maketh a vessel unto honour, and with great care and close attention fashioneth it; so the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground in his own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, the breath of the holy and ever-blessed God; then man became a living soul. And scarcely were our first parents placed upon the earth when the Saviour was also with them, walking in their company among the trees of the garden. Then you think, then all was well. Nothing that was opposed to God at that time existed among men; nothing that could disturb the harmony. But if I tell you that it was through our fall and our sin, that his delight to dwell among us gained strength and warmth, how will you give credence to the assertion? Yet it was so in reality. For then the bowels of his mercy began to yearn towards us; and then first did that which Zechariah says bear its full sense and meaning; ' Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation." (Zechariah 2:13.) And now, dear brethren, I would go back with you to the period of the old covenant, and show you how the Saviour, from the beginning, went in and out among sinners, and erected his habitation among men who are dust and ashes. (Genesis 18:27.) I would accompany you into that wilderness where He found Hagar, an Egyptian maid, and addressed to her words of tenderness. (Genesis 21:17-21.) I would conduct you further, into the plains of Mamre, and disclose to your view the wondrous sight of the Lord of Hosts sitting, in the heat of the day, under the shade of the trees with our father Abraham. (Genesis 18:18.) I would go with you to Bethel, (Genesis 18:19.) and thence to Penuel, (Genesis 32:30.) and to Horeb, where the Lord revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. (Exodus 3:1; Exodus 17:6.) Then I would open, if it might be, for a moment, the pillar of cloud and of fire, that you might there behold His face. (Nehemiah 9:12; Psalms 99:7.) Forty years long did He thus conduct them, as their guide and protector, though they were a stiff-necked people. 0, is it not wonderful? What is there wanting here of delights with

the sons of men? And now I would pass onwards with you to Ophra, where with Gideon, you might behold the Saviour of men sitting under an oak. (Judges 6:11.) Then I would repair to Jerusalem, where, over the mercy seat in the temple, He dwelleth between the cherubim. (Exodus 25:22; Psalms 80:1.) This would I do ■ But, dear brethren, what need of journeying so far? He is near at hand. Where are we to-day? Are we not at Bethlehem? (Luke 2:4-7.) O look then into the stable and the manger. What do you behold there? " A child." Yes, a child; and indeed the same that has said, " My delights were with the sons of men." God incarnate ■ in a manger ■ in swaddling clothes ■ at a mother's breast ■ " Great, great, is the mystery of godliness!" Here the mind can proceed no further: the knees tremble, and the heart is filled with amazement; the wonder is too great for the weakness of human nature. It is well that our eyes are dim-sighted; it is well that we behold it only from afar, and scarcely understand the thousandth part thereof: it would otherwise deprive us of our lives; it would overpower us; we could not endure it.

Yes, though the intercourse of the Son of God with Israel was sweet and refreshing, it cannot be considered, in the full sense of that expression, as His dwelling among men: it was, as a relationship, too distant, too cold a friendship. He, the God of heaven, and they poor sinners ■ the disparity was too great. He thence became incarnate, a child, our kinsman, our brother. Yet all that we can say respecting this great mystery is as nothing; for even the seraphim, who now for nearly two thousand years since this great event have looked into this abyss of love, and vainly tried to fathom it, and who never cease from their astonishment, and the matter of all whose hallelujahs is derived from the cleft rock of the living fountain ■ even they cannot fully declare it. But what moved the great God to humble himself thus? Nothing but his love to man. "My delights were with the sons of men." But whence were they derived? Whence but from Himself? Here we have traced love to its source. Higher we cannot ascend. And now, brethren, I would briefly observe to you, that though the Saviour is no longer cradled in a manger, yet he still bears the human form,, and is our Brother, even to the present hour, though he again sits upon his throne; and he has the same tender heart, having been tempted in all points like unto his brethren, that he might be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and sympathize with us, and succour us in our distress. And though we cannot take up in our arms the holy child Jesus, as did Mary and Simeon, yet his delight to dwell with the sons of men has not diminished, and his communion with us is equally near; yea, much nearer and more intimate. And he does not merely tarry for the night, but he dwells with us as one of the household; and therefore he says, that though he is ever in the high and holy place, yet he is also continually among his people upon earth. He taketh up his abode with us. ■ let us praise the Lord. And how doth he dwell with us? Is it as a superior in rank, who deems it a sufficient honour to mingle in our society, that we may offer him our services, and from whom we are to expect no service in return? Far otherwise. He has himself said, that He is as one that serveth. (Luke 22:27; John 13:4-17.) how precious is the Saviour, how worthy of our love! Doth He then dwell with us as a counselor, whose advice we may ask in matters of great moment? But why only in such? He would that we should regard him as one of the family, and He gladly receives us and resolves our doubts, in little as well as in great things. You should lay all your concerns unreservedly before him, and not think that you are permitted to communicate with him only respecting spiritual things. I say unto you, that he will be careful of the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruse. (1 Kings 17:14.) He will inquire after the provision which is made for your wants; (John 21:5-13.) and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (Psalms 84:11.) 0, if you would believe, you should see the glory of God. " What nation is there so great, who hath

God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" (Deuteronomy 4:7.) He is about our bed and about our path; He would have us take no thought what we shall eat or what we shall drink, nor wherewithal we shall be clothed, for He careth for us, and knoweth that we have need of these things. (Matthew 6:31-32.) His delights are with the sons of men. ■ And yet more, for He is described in my text, as, 2. REJOICING IN THE HABITABLE PART OF HIS EARTH." The Son of God here expresses the joy which he received from dwelling among men. And why should we doubt that the Saviour literally rejoiced among the inhabitants of the earth? Was he not once a child, like other children, in all things the same, sin only excepted? Was there not a time when his heart had never been oppressed with any burden, nor his eyes suffused with tears; when his infant feet were not wounded and bleeding by the thorns and thistles, which grow on the path to the altar of sacrifice; and the cross, and shame, and death, and all that was before him, were concealed within the veil of futurity? He was no wayward or fretful child, but serene and affable, and therefore, as we are informed by St. Luke, he grew in favour, not only with God, but also with men, and the mutual endearments between a child and his mother must have been exquisitely enjoyed by him. And the angels of God may be supposed to have come down, not only to witness, but also to participate in these joys.

We may well imagine the existence of such delights, when the aged Simeon took up the little child in his arms, and his soul was so transported, that the old man became himself almost a child again, and embraced the Holy Babe, and leaped, and wept, and smiled, at the same moment, feeling that nothing more was left for him to desire, for his eyes had seen God’s salvation. But more is contained in the expression. It leads us to think also of the day of creation. In the verses preceding our text, it is said, " When he gave the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment; when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before Him." What would the Son of God teach us here? What else, than that He created the world not only with wisdom, but also with love; not alone for the use and benefit, but for the happiness and joy of the children of men, of whom even then He thought with tenderness.

Yes, dear brethren, as the Lord clothed the flowers of the field, and decked the lilies with their festal garment ■ as He suspended the azure canopy in the heavens, and beautified the fields with living verdure ■ as he lifted up on high the lofty mountains, and formed the peaceful valleys among the hills ■ the quiet lonely dales with their cool and shady brooks; as He gave their cheerful notes to the songsters of the grove, and to those which fly heavenward with the voice of praise ■ as he adorned and diversified the workmanship of his hands, with such, decorations and embellishments, with such lovely hues, and sweet and melodious sounds, and goodly prospects; ■ in all this we see the Saviour’s delight and rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth. And since He has so determined, that the external objects of nature should be as a sacred volume, which we can only partially understand; since He has made the creatures to be as shadows and representations of invisible and spiritual things, and comprehended all high and eternal. truths therein, as in pleasing emblems and pictorial delineations, which it is our privilege to read, even in the present day; since He has appointed the sun to be an image of himself, and set forth in its effects his own operations in the kingdom of grace; since He has decreed that the corn of wheat, in that it dies, and puts forth its tender blade and fruit-bearing stem, should teach us that, " except a man be born again, he cannot sec the kingdom of God; and since He has made the butterfly’’,

which, with beautifully painted wing, rests upon the rose, to be a joyful herald of the resurrection from the dead, and of the future glorious liberty of the children of God: ■ in these things, brethren, in all these, which are His own works, is the Son of God made manifest, as rejoicing in His habitable part of the earth and delighting with the sons of men. And that which we behold in his works, we are taught also by His dealing with the children of men. See how he condescends to our ideas, desires, and expressions. Thus, in His word he is not ashamed to accommodate himself to our weakness, but employs language adapted to our infantile condition. " For whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Is it not them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts? And therefore precept hath been given upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little. And with stammering lips and another tongue doth he speak to this people." (Isaiah 28:9-11.)

Behold how He stoops to our conceptions and modes of life. He draws near to us. He comes down to the level of the comprehension and understanding of poor blind sinners who are but dust and ashes. Observe how in one place he speaks of " repentmg;" and yet he cannot in reality repent; in another place, he assures us that his heart yearns towards us as that of a tender father; and again, to reveal to us our future glory, the representations are taken from the sources of human delight and pleasure, from banquets and marriage feasts, and beautiful houses and palaces; from brilliant stones of varied hue, and precious metals; from green trees and pleasant fruits. Is not this condescending accommodation to our thoughts and imaginations an illustration of our text, that the great God rejoices in the habitable parts of his earth, and his delights are with the sons of men? And truly, whoever has not found God thus revealed in his word, is ignorant of the God of the Bible. And now recall to mind the manner in which God is wont to bring near to us the mysteries of his will, and how he strengthens our faith in his word and promises. He places before us, as is our custom with children, all kinds of beautiful pictures, and figures in various coloring, to attract and fix our attention, and thereby he enlightens our mind, and enables us to consider and understand that which would otherwise be beyond our apprehension. Thus, for instance, that we may retain with freshness in our memories the promise which he gave to Noah, and be assured of its certainty, he has suspended in the clouds a lovely bow, painted with seven colors, to which we may direct our eyes; and he tells us, that as often as he shall look upon this bow, he will remember his promise that he will no more destroy the earth by a flood; as though God must needs place a memorial before his eyes, lest he should forget his word of promise. But he knew that this would minister to our comfort, and tend to confirm our faith. Thus, again did our Lord very graciously condescend to the weakness of Gideon, when He acceded to his request, and so quickly and readily performed that strange mystery which Gideon besought of Him, as a new sign under the promise he had received from the Lord. First, the dew was to be upon the fleece alone, the earth around it remaining dry; and then the fleece was to be dry, and all the ground covered with dew. (Judges 6:37-39.) And God did both these things, just as Gideon requested. How much tenderness and kindness is here! But the things of God have all a deep signification. Thus, as the Lord in the rainbow of Noah, depicted with fine touches for spiritual perception, an emblem of the promised Mediator, so did he intimate, by prophetic representation, in that miracle with which he pleased Gideon, how He would, in after ages, visit mankind with the heavenly dew of his appearing, and of the out-pouring of his Spirit. First, the dew of his grace was upon Israel alone, whilst the whole of the earth beside was dry, and afterwards, the dew was diffused over the whole of the earth, Israel alone being dry, as it is to this day.

Look again at the tabernacle and temple of Solomon. There, by multitudes of allusions and shadows, and cunning works of certain signification, did wisdom bring near to the Jews all the great and blessed mysteries and truths of God. And to us also, she speaks, in like manner, by the sacraments of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, and by the rite of Confirmation. Is there not, in this, evidence of the delights of the Lord with his weak children, who have need of something sensible and perceptible that they may be able to know and believe? And how much grace and lovingkindness is manifested therein!

Let me now remind you of God''s daily dispensations towards us. By them he designs to teach us important lessons, the attainment of which should rather be sought than the indulgence of superfluous sorrow or distress, whenever we are brought into painful circumstances. Thus, for instance, the Lord sometimes hides himself from our view; we are then ready to think that he has forsaken us and forgotten us; but He would teach us our entire dependence upon himself, and when he hears our voice entreating his return, he lifts up the light of his countenance upon us, and gives us peace.

Again, our former sins, which we have long thought to be buried in the depths of the sea, arise before our view in fearful array, and we tremble, as at first, when awakened to repentance. Our first love has, perhaps, grown cold, and He would thus rekindle it in our souls.

Now, He sets before us the greatness of our misdeeds, and we become fearful of His wrath; but his design is to manifest more fully the sweetness of his grace, and the all-sufficiency of his merits and righteousness. At another time, He permits our enemy to stretch forth his hand as if he would seize our crown, and also suffers him to attempt to shake the foundation of our comfort and our hope beneath our feet. We cry in the agony of the disciples in the storm, " Lord, help us, we perish." But the danger is not so great as we apprehend. He has brought us into such a state, that we may grasp more firmly that which we have, not, as we imagined, that we should lose it. And when, by various means. He gives us counsel in dark parables for our conduct, that thereby, as also by reason of use, our spiritual senses may be exercised to discern both good and evil; (Hebrews 5:14.) and when He makes use of apparently the least important circumstances in our life, that by means of them he may speak to our heart something consolatory, instructive, or profitable; when He selects ordinary subjects, arising from our every-day conversation, and, with Divine wisdom and skill, makes them the channel for conveying a rich and full supply of manifold spiritual mercies, or converts them into tablets on which he inscribes a doctrine, or warning, an encouragement, a promise or historical incident of his word; when He so tenderly has respect to our most trifling desires, and in the most minute circumstances surprises us by the ready communication of his counsel and blessing; and, in our reading the Holy Scriptures, when He takes, if I may so say, the least significant passages, and by them instructs us in the deep and mysterious things of God, conveying them to our souls with lively apprehension and quickening power ■ when such is the method of God with us, we are furnished with additional proof of His rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth, and that his delights are with the children of men. To allude, in conclusion, to the lovely tones which issue from the tabernacles of the righteous ■ He, who is the Wisdom of God is the source of all harmony. All music upon earth, but that which proceeds from Him, is dissonance in his ears, and like the hoarse croaking of the raven. As it was He who gave the harp of David its heavenly sound, and touched its strings upon the hill of Bethlehem, and sang the pleasant Psalms with the voice of the royal Psalmist; so is it He who,

even in these days, opens the lips of the spiritual choir, and gives the full tone and sweet expression to their voice; it is He who awakens the melody in their hearts, and moves the hidden chords of their soul with the breath of his mouth. He is in their soft and solemn sounds, and in their lofty songs of praise. He speaks within them in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. He is in their loud cry to the cross, and their rejoicing on the hill of the sealed ones; (Revelation 7:1-17) yea, He is in every Alpha and Omega of the new heart, in every Hosannah of sacred homage, in every Hallelujah of heavenly joy, and in the great universal temple-chorus of his sacred worshipers; " Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen." In all this the Lord himself is manifest ■ the Lord and his Spirit. It is He that plays and makes melody on the harp of our souls; and only those songs to which He himself gives utterance within us, fall harmoniously on his ear, however weak and imperfect they seem to ourselves.

Behold, my brethren, thus doth the Lord rejoice in the habitable part of his earth, thus are his delights with the children of men. Happy, truly happy, are the people who have the Lord so nigh unto them, and to whom he manifests himself in such tenderness and love! Of such is the kingdom of God. Forget not that the great and the wise, namely, they that consider themselves such, are not of that number. Hear the voice of Christ himself, " Verily, I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein." (Luke 18:17.) Let us then be children, dear brethren, little children. Towards such is the desire of Immanuel; only among children will he dwell. And wherever He dwells, surely it is good to be there, it is already a heaven in the wilderness; and therefore has it been said. And be my home a straw-built cot, Yet happy will I deem my lot, If there Thou dwell’st with me; Or bid me go through deserts waste, E’en to the stake, I’ll joyful haste, If guided there by Thee!

How sweet this little verse! When will the Lord enable us to adopt it as our own? May it be very shortly! May the name of Jesus become more precious to us, more loved and honoured every day; and may we know and possess, more and more, the joys and delights which He shares on earth with his dear children, his adopted ones; and, finally, may we participate in the glories of His kingdom.

Amen.

01.8. The Temptation of Christ

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS.

We stand to day on that memorable battle-field where those laurels were won which encircle our brows, and that triumph was achieved which makes us victorious before the conflict, and even in death more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us. (Romans 8:37.)

Never was there a battle fought more wonderful in its nature, more important in its consequences, nor one which so deeply affects our everlasting interests.

It is good for us to sit down awhile, and give ourselves to the absorbing contemplation of this great sight.

1. THE LEADING INTO THE WILDERNESS.

Together with the consecration and anointing of our Lord to the mediatorial office by the water of the Jordan, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, did Jesus receive from heaven the divine testimony that he was the only begotten Son of God in whom the Father was well pleased. (Matthew 3:16-17.) The Sonship of our Lord, and his essential unity with the Father, appear to have been to him, in the days of his flesh, more an object of faith than of sight, perception, or feeling. At moments, at least, he could, in such a manner, conceal his Godhead from his view, and hide it in the back ground, that he apprehended it only in simple faith on the bare word of the Father.

It was not for the disciples only, but for himself also, that the voice was heard on different occasions from heaven, "This is my beloved Son" ■ for himself, to strengthen his faith, which, sometimes, as for instance, when he was forsaken of the Father on the Cross, was bare and simple trust in the Father’s love, without any sensible experience of that endearing relationship. (Matthew 27:46.)

Consecrated and divinely invested with his priestly office, Jesus immediately hastened into the depths of the wilderness. He who led him, was, according to the evangelists, the Holy Ghost. (Mark 1:12.) Was the Saviour aware for what purpose the Spirit led him into the wilderness? Perhaps only in part; the great and special cause the Father may have concealed from him. We learn also from our own experience, that it is not always the will of the Holy Ghost to make known to us before hand his designs in leading us.

He not unfrequently conducts us in entire darkness. We are conscious of his inward call, " Arise, and depart to such a place, or in such circumstances, or at such a time." We ask, "why? for what purpose?" but receive no answer. The command is only given yet louder, and with more urgency in our heart, ’ Go, haste, delay not." We inquire again, what can be the meaning of this internal impulse, but it remains a mystery. We must proceed in darkness, and should we object, the probability is a tumult in the conscience, and a bitter feeling of the divine displeasure in our soul. We must go, we are obliged, and not till afterwards is made known to us the reason. (John 8:7.)

Here, Philip finds a chamberlain who has been awaiting his exposition of the Scriptures, (Acts 8:27.) and there, Elijah meets a widow, whose soul he should enrich with heavenly treasure. (1 Kings 17:10.) At one place a disconsolate brother cries to us, even when yet we are a great way off, "Ah, you come to me as an angel sent from God;" and in another place it is made manifest to us, in a different way, wherefore the Spirit hath called and sent us: either the sun arises upon our path, and all becomes clear and bright around us, or the Spirit gives us some slight intimations of his purpose; but all beyond this, and that which is most important, he keeps back, hidden from our eyes.

One says, I must retire to my chamber to pray, or go to such a house to succour and assist an afflicted brother, or to a particular place to render some special service; but of all that which is designed for us in such places, more than the service, assistance, or prayer ■ that we shall wrestle with God, (Genesis 32:24.) or become humble and contrite in spirit, (Isaiah 57:15; Isaiah 66:2.) or pass through the purifying furnace, (Malachi 3:3. Isaiah 48:10.) or meet the hosts of Mahanaim, (Genesis 32:1-2.) or whatever it may be ■ of all this no mention has been made to us. It shall become known to us hereafter in the way of experience.

It seems to have been thus with our Saviour. He went into the wilderness half in light and half in darkness. Perhaps he knew only generally, that he must go into the wilderness to fast, suffer want, and endure hardship, and in the depths of extreme humiliation and poverty enter upon the work of his priesthood. So much the Spirit unfolded to him, but the severe, the fearful temptation which awaited him appears, according to the counsel of the Father, to have been carefully hidden from his view. The unexpectedness of the assault would add severity to the conflict, that the triumph might be the greater and more glorious.

2. THE FAST.

Jesus went into the wilderness to fast. So far extended his light at that time, and yet farther ■ to its great design, its mysterious signification. Was not then the fast of Jesus in the special plan of him who led him into the wilderness? By all means. That he should be so tried was according to the purpose of God, but only a part of it. Do you ask, then, on what account it was necessary that Jesus should fast, and why in such a dreadful solitude so painfully, so long ■ forty days and forty nights? In reply, I would remark, that it was of a very different description from that of Moses on Mount Sinai, and other saints. The fast of Jesus was something more than a devotional exercise and preparation for the priestly office, it was an initiatory work of sacrifice. The key, not only of the temptation, but of the fast of our Lord, is to be found behind the gate of a lost paradise. It is an expiation for Adam’s eating of the forbidden tree, (Genesis 3:6.) an atonement for his guilt, a satisfying passion. Did the progenitor of the human race dwell in the happy plains of paradise? We behold the second Adam in the desolate wilderness. Did the first man, who was of the earth, earthy, (1 Corinthians 15:47.) live amidst lovely trees and delicious fruits in the garden of Eden? The second man, who is the Lord from heaven, must endure hunger in a wilderness, amid stones and rank weeds, where not an ear of corn grew to relieve the extreme necessity of his nature. Did our forefather enjoy the most delightful communion with God and the holy angels, and the society of his spotless wife? Jesus, on the contrary, was banished into the most gloomy desert; he was with the wild beasts, as Mark informs us, (Mark 1:13.) and with the old serpent, with Satan and his angels. 0, how great the contrast! But thus it was ordained of God. Our Surety and Representative,

by fasting and suffering want in the dreary and inhospitable wilderness, made atonement in the sinner's stead, for the sinful presumption with which Adam, in the face of an express divine warning and threat, stretched forth his hand to the fruit of the forbidden tree. This he did for his people, and they have no farther atonement to make to all eternity. But you by whom the everlasting satisfaction of the Lamb of God is not estimated aright; you see in the circumstances of our Lord in the wilderness, a true portrait of your own coming destiny. Thus must you ever dwell in the eternal wilderness, and when you are an hungered, they shall thrust a stone into your mouth instead of bread; and when you shall suffer thirst, you must swallow flames instead of water, and you shall live as though among wild beasts and hissing serpents, and you shall be alone, in solitude, amidst the multitudes of the damned, for in hell there is no endearing intercourse nor friendship; there, hate and selfishness bear sway, and each one is too much engrossed with his own pain and suffering to sympathize with another. And the duration of this misery is called Eternity. With this truth one would suppose we could make rocks leap from their everlasting beds, and hills tremble. But your hearts do not tremble. Alas! they are harder than the stony rock.

Fasts are also observed in the kingdom of God; bodily and spiritual fasts, of various kinds, painful and joyous. The most joyous are celebrated in the spring-time of the new life, at the beginning of conversion, after the first assurance of divine grace, after the first manifestation of love from the heavenly bridegroom, when God calleth the young child out of Egypt. Then it is not needful to urge us to self-denial. All this is done at once and without solicitation. How does the man fly as with wings from the scenes of pleasure and dissipation of an infatuated world; how can he " fill his belly with the husks that the swine do eat," (Luke 15:16.) after he has drunk of the wine of the " goodly land," and partaken of the " milk and honey" with which it flows? (Deuteronomy 3:25. Exodus 3:8.) How can he take pleasure in the sounds which control the dance, or in the song of the voluptuary, after he has heard the harp of David struck by his kingly hand? How can theatrical representations and the tricks of the juggler afford gratification to any one, after he has seen heaven with all its glory opened before him? and how can he any longer recline upon the couch of ease and of revelry, when he has beheld Him whom his soul loveth suspended on the accursed tree, bleeding and crowned with thorns? Away, then ■ away quickly with the shadow of your pitiful delights, and with the tinsel of your vanities. This is our day of fast.

It is often a subject of debate and inquiry, whether certain pleasures or enjoyments are compatible with Christianity or not. Let us cease to ask such questions, and become Christians, then shall we know what is consistent and what is not, and how far one that is born again, an heir of God and his kingdom, may proceed in such things.

There is yet another fast in a state of grace, and one of a more painful description, when the soul is led, not from the field of the world to the green pastures of the Lamb, but from the latter into the wilderness, and this is a very bitter reverse. We were ■ ah! how unspeakably happy, in the bosom of Jesus. Such sweet sensations and emotions, such tender delights and pleasures, such touching and affecting apprehensions of the grace and nearness of our Saviour, pervaded and filled our souls, that we earnestly desired, from this blessed foretaste of heavenly joys, to pass at once into their full fruition in paradise. The south wind blew upon our garden, and the spices thereof flowed out; (Song of Solomon 4:16.) the grapes of Canaan refreshed our lips, and the pleasurable sensations of love distilled like the dew of the early dawn upon our soul. O, how abundantly were we satisfied ■ the sorrows of this world were utterly forgotten. But, before we were aware, a fast

was appointed, and the bridegroom was taken from us. (Matthew 9:15.) The fountains of milk and honey were dried up, and the soul, deprived of her refreshment, sat motionless, with her harp unstrung, upon the glowing sand, thirsting for the dew of heaven to fall upon the parched ground.

These are the fast-days of the child of God in the wilderness. Happy is he whose comforts are derived from Christ and his word, and not from feelings and emotions. "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure," (Isaiah 33:16.) If he has not sensible perception, he has, at least, faith; and if he is destitute of feeling, yet the ground of his confidence is secure. He shelters himself beneath the rock of the sure promise of his God, and he knows that though the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, yet God's kindness shall not depart from him, neither shall the covenant of his peace be removed. (Isaiah 54:10.) And this fast in the wilderness, when it is of God's appointment, is good and wholesome. The same love which dispenses our food to-day, leaves us to-morrow to suffer hunger, and keep a day of fasting and abstinence. What more do we need, if only to the hand of grace we look for guidance? Let it lead us as it will.

3. THE TEMPTATIONS.

Jesus went into the wilderness to fast, but yet more than this was designed in the purpose of God. What says the evangelist? " Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to he tempted of the devil." These are fearful words. The Holy Ghost leads the Son of God into the presence of the devil, and for what purpose? In plain and unequivocal words it is written, that he might be tempted of the devil. How remarkable. But this dark and wondrous event speaks comfort to you, O ye heirs of the kingdom. It would encourage your hearts, ye troubled souls. It is recorded for your instruction.

Let none among you suppose that he who goeth about as a roaring lion is free and unrestrained, and can fall upon you when he will; that he can launch his darts according to his pleasure; and lay his snares unperceived by the captain of the hosts of the Lord. (Joshua 5:14.)

Far otherwise. Our leader has him ever in his sight, and holds him firmly bound by his strong word. Even Satan himself has found what the Preacher declares, that " the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." (Ecclesiastes 9:11.) In vain does he attack any respecting whom Jesus has said to him, " touch not mine anointed." A wall of fire encircles such an one by that word of his Master; a protecting wall over which the fiery darts of the wicked one can find no passage. (Zechariah 2:5.) But every assault of Satan is by the express permission of the Lord Jesus, (Job 2:11-12,) and consequently for the spiritual good of the believer; and the line is pointed out by the kingly sceptre, with minute exactness, how far he may go, and no farther. What power, then, doth the wicked one possess? He is led forth and made a show of openly, and Immanuel triumphs over him in himself. (Colossians 2:15. marginal reading.) Henceforth he is among those principalities in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, which must bow to the sceptre of Jesus. (Ephesians 1:21; Php 2:10.) The Lord employs him as he did a Nebuchadnezzar, a Korah, and other outcasts, as a rod in his hand, for the good of his people; and when he has made a sufficient use of this terrible scourge, he will break it in pieces■ he will lay hold of the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and shut up and seal him in the bottomless pit. (Revelation 20:2-3.)

Rejoice then, ye little flock of God, that the devil is under the direction and control of the Good Shepherd, and is made use of only for your benefit. As often as the fiery darts of the wicked one

hiss around you, remember, beloved, that it is the Lord, even the Spirit, who has led you into the wilderness, who has placed you in the conflict, and who is himself your strength and shield.

All the temptations of the children of God are permitted for one great purpose, they shall make manifest the graces concealed in their souls.

Sometimes it is pleasing' to the Lord himself to behold these hidden things brought to light. For he delighteth in his work.

It was when our father Abraham had, in every respect, completed the preparations for his painful offering on Mount Moriah, that the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, " Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." (Genesis 22:11-12.) This our Lord well knew, but he wished to make manifest the fear of God which he had wrought in his heart, and which it was his delight to behold. And so must many of the children of grace, in our own day, be tried and tempted, that the Lord Jesus may witness their perseverance in prayer, and hearing of the word; the storm is sent, that the Lord may behold them believingly pass onward over the troubled waters in their right course, and himself conduct them to the haven of peace. (Mark 6:47-48.) It is this that gives him joy.

We ought not, perhaps, to speak thus to those afflicted ones. They would think that we were mocking, for they perceive in themselves no graces in which the Lord should delight; but they are seen and acknowledged of him.

Frequently doth the Lord suffer his children to fall into temptation, not so much himself to behold that which is concealed in their hearts, as to make it manifest to their brethren and sisters. For this end he reveals to us the faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the love of Moses, the zeal of Elijah, the humility and ardor of the woman of Canaan, that we may give glory to his power, which has wrought so mightily in the feeble children of men. But are we disheartened, and do we think, that such holy ones may well expect an entrance into the kingdom of God, but what hope is there for us? Then he brings at one time a David, at another a Peter, before our view ■ grapes from which, in the wine-vat, were extracted not only wine, but the bitter waters of sin; and such a sight restores our confidence, especially when we hear that Simon is not the less called " a stone," and David " a man after God's own heart." And so has it often been, that men, from whom holiness beamed forth with especial splendor, and who, beyond others, have enjoyed the high estimation of the church, have yet at length, under the power of temptation, been so shorn of their beams and goodly coloring, and their weakness and sinfulness have become so manifested; or, to change the figure, from a noble stream they have dwindled into an insignificant brook, which loses itself in the sand; that when compared with that which they once were, we can scarcely recognize the same individuals. This the Lord permits to take place, that mortal man may beware of idols, may keep his graces bright, and give honour to Him only to whom it is due.

One great benefit of the temptations to which we are subjected is, that we may learn more of ourselves, that we may see the sin that dwelleth in us, and humbly lie in the dust. (Romans 7:17.)

We children of men too easily deem ourselves righteous, but Jesus calls the ungodly and sinners to repentance. We too quickly ascend the mountain, but Jesus would see us in the valley. He would humble our pride. And therefore it is, that he suffers the devil, for a little while, to stir up the stink of our corrupt nature, that the noisome odour may invade our senses, and the brood of

serpents and vipers, which lay lurking beneath, may crawl upon the surface before our eyes. The Lord permits the wicked one at times to arouse tumultuously the swarm of unrighteous thoughts and desires which slumber in the inmost recesses of our souls, that we may be sensible of the evils with which the temple of God is infested, and never think of pride or boasting more. He suffers the devil sometimes to invade us, and to blow the trumpet to awaken the evil propensities within. How do we wonder that they are there. We had thought that we had long ago banished them by our holy exercises, and that the house was rendered clean. But now we find it quite otherwise. When so humbled, the bride is again conscious that the false coloring has faded from her cheeks, and is, in her own estimation, as at first, black and without comeliness, and lies low in her first repentance, and loves with her first love. (Song of Solomon 1:5. Revelation 2:4.)

There, breaks at once beneath our feet the topmost step in the ladder of our sanctity, and not even the lowest will serve to support us any longer, but we lie upon the ground, and are conscious that we are poor sinners, such as, perhaps, we had never seen ourselves before.

Robbed of our decorations and ornaments, we hide ourselves with shame out of sight, and again rejoice from our inmost soul that another will clothe us with a wedding garment, that a cross was erected on Golgotha, and that one sits upon the throne who is not only called Righteousness, but Grace.

4. THE DESIGN OF OUR LORD'S TEMPTATION.

We have already seen why God permits his children to be tempted. The inquiry then arises, on what account did he suffer the Lord Jesus to be so tried? And here do we most solemnly protest, on the outset, against that most degrading doctrine, which irreverently declares that Jesus was placed in the fire of temptation, that he might, by wrestling and praying, overcome the sins which he bore in his flesh and in his members. No, we cannot endure to hear this of our Saviour. That he appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, we allow; but it was only in the likeness, not in the sinful flesh itself; (Romans 8:3.) and if he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet was there one point excepted, namely, sin. (Hebrews 4:15.)

Blessed be God, that his word does not leave us in doubt as to this matter. With our Mediator's perfect and entire freedom from sin stands or falls the whole building of our Gospel hope. Were the white linen of his righteousness stained with the smallest speck of ungodly emotions, could any one prove this to us, then might the churches be closed, the Bible burnt, our confidence cast away, and despair prevail. For then would Jesus not be our Saviour, and the price which he has paid would be inadequate and unsatisfying. The temptations which befell our Lord were very different from those which we are wont to experience. He encountered them, not for himself, but for us, and in our stead. They belong to the sufferings connected with his offering as our substitute.

We saw Adam tempted by the serpent, but he wantonly permitted himself to be hurried along by the overwhelming torrent. The second Adam, to atone for this, sustained a more painful assault, broke the spears of the enemy, signally overcame the adversary, and yielded to the Father a perfect obedience.

Adam, through disobedience, became the prey of the devil; the second Adam bore for him the curse, descended from the throne of the majesty on high, to mingle with wicked spirits in the

regions of the lost. Unexampled humiliation! The Almighty God touched by the murderous hands of Satan! the King of the Universe hissed at by the old serpent! the Most Holy beset and surrounded by the powers of darkness! and the Lord of Hosts a sport for the cursed spirits of hell, and tempted and challenged to that which is most sinful! Most horrible situation for the Son of God! the most appalling that we can imagine: for we are placed by nature nearer to the devil, who, as our Lord declares, is, in our natural state, our father, (John 8:44.) we bear his likeness, and therefore his foulness is not so abhorrent to us as it must be to him who dwelleth in light, and is himself the light. (1 Timothy 6:16. John 1:9.)

Truly no small anguish must it have been to him thus to dwell in the midst of devils. But even to this pool and pit was the Son of God obliged to come down, and thus the wild boars of Belial encompassed him with their terrors, that a payment might be made for the enormous guilt that man had heaped up; and amid such resisting powers and obstacles was he necessitated, alone, in strife and battle to do the will of God, and with the glories of his perfect obedience to cover the disobedience of Adam and his seed.

Another design of the temptations of Jesus was, that he might become for us a High Priest touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Such, indeed, he could have been without experiencing the assaults which we must endure; but now that he has made such a display of his love, we poor children of men can more easily believe in his sympathy, and we can with the greater freedom pour out our heart before him, and show him all our complaint. When two men meet who can speak of the same trials and of the same buffetings of Satan, O what better preparation can there be for an intimate union, for a free communication, and tender sympathy? They pour out their souls to each other. Their hearts overflow, and the time passes rapidly. In the presence of one, on the contrary, who has never felt as we have, we are mute. We have no inclination to communicate to him our state, since we fear that he can neither understand us nor feel for our case. And we should certainly have felt much more distance with our heavenly friend, if he had not become a partaker of our sorrows. But now the thought affects us deeply that he himself was tempted in all points like as we are, and knows by his own experience the most bitter anguish of our souls. If then no man understand us, we have a friend near at hand to whom we need only unfold our state and circumstances, and he knows at once how to encourage our souls. His fellow-feeling extends even to the darkest night of the soul, the most fearful depths of internal suffering and distress.

You can sit under no juniper-tree beneath which He has not already sat; no thorn can wound you which has not made His heart to bleed; no fiery dart can strike you which has not first been hurled at His sacred head. Why then should we doubt of his compassion.

Yes, believe it only, beloved, whenever you lie in the furnace; the eyes of the refiner are upon you, (Malachi 3:3,) and the heart of the High and Holy One, whose love is more tender than a mother’s, bleeds over you for sympathy in heaven. (Isaiah 49:15; Hebrews 4:15.)

These then, with respect to the world of sinners, were the great designs of mercy and love, in subjecting the Son of God to the fire of temptation. But it may be inquired, whether God had not some reference to the tempter himself? and this we shall be able to answer the more readily, when we clearly understand the position which that fallen prince of angels sustains in the kingdom of spirits. That satyr-like figure, with horns and hoofs, which is assigned him by popular tradition, has no reality: it is far from the truth, and partakes more of the ridiculous and contemptible, than of that

which is great and terrific. But read and compare together the several scattered notices which the Scriptures in many places afford respecting these fallen morning-stars, these first of created beings; observe their character and features, which the word of God incidentally depicts, and there is a certain awe and wonder, which, at the sight of the prince of hell, you cannot shake off.

He is that leviathan of whom the Lord speaks, (Job 41:1-9.) " Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down? Canst thou put a hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn? Will he make many supplications unto thee? Will he speak soft words unto thee? Will he make a covenant with thee? Wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens? Shall thy companions make a banquet of him? Shall they part him among the merchants? Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish spears? Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more. Behold, the hope of him is in vain. Shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?"

He is that powerful one of whom testimony is given. ’ None is so fierce that dare stir him up. Who can discern the face of his garment? or who can come to him with his double bridle? Who can open the doors of his face? His teeth are terrible round about. His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. One is so near to another, that no air can come between them. They are joined one to another; they stick together, that they cannot be sundered. By his neesings a light doth shine, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out. Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething-pot or cauldron. His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth. In his neck remaineth strength, and sorrow is turned into joy before him. The flakes of his flesh are joined together; they are firm in themselves, they cannot be moved. His heart is as firm as a stone, yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. When he raiseth up himself the mighty are afraid. By reason of breakings they purify themselves. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee, sling-stones are turned with him into stubble. Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear. Sharp stones are under him; he spreadeth sharp pointed things upon the mire, he maketh the deep to boil like a pot, he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment. He maketh a path to shine after him: one would think the deep to be hoary. Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. He beholdeth all high things. He is a king over all the children of pride."

Behold, these are the features of this powerful Spirit, who, with regard to his original glory, is nothing more nor less than the idol of the rationalists. In these great and wondrous ruins of his former glory doth Satan give praise to him who created him. For who is his equal in knowledge and wisdom? who in perseverance, and energy, and power? And yet that which we perceive in him is but the remains of his original splendor. He is set forth in the Scriptures as possessing a certain majesty, not only because he is called a lord, a powerful one, a prince, but also the God of this world. (2 Corinthians 4:4.)

Observe how the apostle Jude speaks of him. ■ " Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, the Lord rebuke thee.’ " (Jude 1:9.) In the Book of Job we see Satan standing among the angels and spirits, around the throne of God. (Job 1:1.) And the Lord speaks to him, and inquires

whether he had considered his servant Job, and after the subtle insinuation of the accuser; " Doth Job fear God for nought?" the Lord gives him power over all that Job had. And thus the devil learned, by this trial of the servant of God, how the strength of the Almighty was made perfect in Job’s weakness.

We might almost say, that it was important to God that even this prince of darkness should acknowledge him, and give him honour. And it was so in reality. For it is written, that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue confess that he is God. (Php 2:11.) And thus, by the temptations of Jesus, was the devil enabled to glance at the sources of the atonement, to see the Lamb of God in his purity, without blemish, to behold the surety in his power, to discharge our debts. Thus also would he learn that Zion is redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness, and not by an arbitrary act; and that no well grounded objection can any more be made against the salvation of sinners. When the most wise and acute of all the spirits is constrained to admire the wisdom of God ■ is silent before his counsel ■ is compelled unwillingly to praise his mighty acts, then doth it redound not a little to the majesty and glory of the Eternal. In the great day of judgment, and of the manifestation of God, that must be one of the most sacred and solemn moments in which Satan will be compelled openly to acknowledge that honour and praise are due to the Lamb; and when one God, if we may so express it, with trembling reverence shall bow the knee to another. It will be an utterance of praise to God of no less power and greatness than the Hallelujahs of the heavenly host.

5. THE TEMPTER.

Forty days and nights had the Lord spent in the lonely desert, fasting, and afterward he was an hungered.

Then came the devil to him openly, but clothed as an angel of light.

He had a two-fold object in view; first, clearly to ascertain whether Jesus were really the Son of God: and, if he should prove to be so, he meant, if possible, to hurl a rock upon him in the way, and for ever mar his work of saving souls.

I am greatly disposed to believe that which has already been advanced by others, that the tempter was as yet in doubt as to the identity of the Messiah.

Jesus had now passed thirty years in the deepest seclusion. The son of a carpenter, he had learned his father’s trade; " in the sweat of his face did he eat bread;" (Genesis 3:19.) he lived plainly, and did and said nothing beyond that which other children of men might have said or done. No one supposed that he was more than an amiable person; and, perhaps, Mary and Joseph were not a little tried in their expectations respecting him, and awaited a voice from heaven.

God veiled his Son so completely, that even the piercing eyes of Satan might not recognize him in this plain carpenter. Yet the devil could not altogether overlook him.

Among men, no one thought that this simple workman at Joseph’s bench could be the Messiah. But Satan was prudent enough not to trust too much to the external appearance of lowliness and poverty. He thought it possible that this carpenter, notwithstanding his outwardly low condition, might, nevertheless, be the Lord; and many things seemed to indicate that thus it was.

He found nothing inconsistent in the supposition that the Redeemer, in such a state of poverty, should commence his task; and many circumstances appeared plainly to indicate that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God. Something of this kind he suspected. As yet he knew nothing certain. He longed for the time when all doubt would be removed. Had Satan known that Jesus of Nazareth was in reality the Messiah, there would be many things inexplicable in his method of proceeding towards him, as we shall hereafter perceive.

Thoroughly to ascertain this point, whether Jesus were the Christ, was the first aim of the tempter. And so cunningly, at the same time, did the subtle spirit plan his temptation, that if Jesus should prove to be the Messiah, he hoped the redemption which he was about to effect should thereby, on the outset, receive such a shock that it might for ever be frustrated. The second object of the prince of darkness was, as by the dexterous thrust of an experienced fencer, to push the Saviour from his mediatorial path, and establish his own dominion over mankind for ever. To effect these purposes, he assumed the character of a well-wisher and friend. He professed that he desired nothing so much as that the work of redemption should be accomplished, and would only show a shorter way to its attainment, and he formed all his projects with as much skill as we might expect to find in one who fell from the greatest height of wisdom and knowledge to the lowest abyss of wickedness.

6. THE APTITUDE OF THE TEMPTATIONS.

Armed with extreme craft and subtlety, the tempter drew near to Jesus. He hoped that the fearful solitude in which our Lord had been, in the dry and barren wilderness, would facilitate his victory. The fact that Jesus hungered, served to direct his first assault ■ so well does this murderer of souls know how to turn his weapons against us. When we are solitary, and apart from the intercourse of men; when no human eye is upon us, no dear brother near to warn and awaken us, no partaker of the same salvation to strengthen our souls; when our thoughts roam freely abroad ■ then doth the wicked one put forth his strength, and bend his bow with might to speed the poisoned barb to our hearts: and when we hunger or thirst; when our mind is inwardly moving us towards earthly riches or honour, towards ease or enjoyment; then is he at hand, with friendly aspect and professions of devotedness: he respectfully submits one good counsel after another; he unfolds means without number of fulfilling our desires; and however unhallowed these suggestions may be, he so well knows how to disguise and recommend them, and secure them a plausible sanction from holy Scripture, that we think surely an angel of God, has met us ■ yet it is none other but Satan himself in the form of an angel of light. The unfathomable mystery of his iniquity has perhaps never manifested itself more fully than in the temptations with which he assaulted our Lord. Can Christ then be tempted? Undoubtedly he can, for St. Paul says. He was, in all points, tempted like as we are. (Hebrews 4:15.) Luther translates it " on all sides." The hand of that venerated man might well have trembled, when he was about to write down the expression " in all points." With holy shame and sacred reverence he selected, in preference, the phrase "on all sides." Our Lord appeared " in the likeness of sinful flesh;" (Romans 8:3.) that is, in the nature of man. All the consequences of sin came upon him, but not sin itself. He was tempted, yet without sin. The sinless propensities and weaknesses of our nature were also the portion of Christ. He hungered and thirsted; he was sensible of fatigue, of rest and refreshment, of joy, and of sorrow. Of these sinless infirmities, therefore, Satan purposed to make use, in attempting to withdraw the Saviour from the path divinely marked out for him. He presented before him unlawful means of

satisfying the desires of nature. Had the Redeemer yielded even in thought to the base insinuations of the wicked one, then would success have crowned the turpitude and villainy of Satan. The Lamb would not have been without spot or blemish, the Priest would not have been undefiled, the sacrifice would have been unavailing, the whole plan of salvation for ever marred, and the entire race of man would have been irrecoverably lost.

How much, then, depended upon that single event which took place in the wilderness!

How immensely important, how intimately connected with our highest destiny, was the temptation of Jesus. Ought we not, therefore, with all the intensity of which our souls are capable, to watch the development and the issue of this wondrous scene!

7. THE FIRST TEMPTATION. The tempter awaited a favourable opportunity for his first attack. It was when Jesus hungered that he came to him, and said, " If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." (Matthew 4:3) This was the first assault by which Satan endeavored partly to arrive at a certainty respecting the person of Jesus; partly, in the event of his really proving to be the Lord from heaven, to bring to nought the great work of the atonement.

He applied himself, in the first place, to defile the immaculate soul of the Redeemer, by infusing into it the sin of distrust. As he opened his attack upon our first parents, by deceiving them with respect to the divine command, (Genesis 3:1.) so also here, " If thou be the Son of God," was nothing else, in reality, than a covert suggestion of the doubt, " Yea, hath God said," a temptation to lead him to question the testimony which, at his baptism, he had received from heaven. And mark the monstrous and unexampled craftiness of the tempter. In these few words, " If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread," under one temptation he concealed numberless snares.

Jesus shall either, as the wicked one supposed, if he be the Son of God, be brought into perplexity respecting his Sonship and the divine testimony ■ (Matthew 3:17.) It will appear to him improbable that God should suffer his Son to perish with hunger amidst the stones and barren thorns of the desert, and then his soul will be defiled with unbelief; or he will lay aside the veil, and, by a miracle, give proof, at once, of his Godhead, and then he will act in opposition to the counsels of heaven, which have assigned him poverty and suffering, and the hiding of his glory, that he may make atonement for Adam’s guilt. (Isaiah 53:1-12.) But should this not take place, thought the tempter; should I fail in my endeavor to induce him to leave the path of humility and lowliness, and to make manifest to myself and others the dignity of his nature, yet his extreme sufferings from hunger will, perhaps, impel him to adopt my suggestion. It will seem to him allowable to save himself from starvation, through the power which God has given him. He will make the stones bread, by an act of his own, to satisfy his hunger, and thus put away from himself the cup of bitterness, without the drinking of which to the dregs a propitiation for sin cannot be made. (Romans 3:25.)

These were the thoughts of the prince of darkness. He hoped that if Jesus should haply escape one snare, yet he would be entangled in a second, or a third. And, indeed, no more subtle or skillful plan could have been imagined.

Without a miracle put forth in his behalf, the most holy of the children of men would, in such circumstances, have fallen. Had there been the smallest vein of sin in Christ, it would have been apparent. But no; not one atom soils the purity of his holiness.

He stands alone in the field; no guards protect him. Yet, behold, He triumphs ■ Satan is defeated. The temptation to make stones into bread is one of frequent occurrence. Something of it has been experienced by all the children of God.

There are brethren among us, (I speak of brethren in the Lord,) to whom a fast also has at the same time been appointed. They have no work nor wages, and yet have need of daily bread.

Brethren, you sit down in the wilderness, amidst stones and thorns, and you are an hungered. It would, indeed, be surprising if the tempter did not present such an idea as this; ■ " Can you really be children of God, when He leaves you to starve?" and then add, " Command that these stones be made bread." It would be a wonder if he did not furnish you with all sorts of counsels, such as " Be mean and flatter, and you shall find favour and gain employment;" or, "deceive and lie, that you may procure wealth;" or, " steal, and save yourselves from famine;" or, " unite yourselves with the enemies of the cross, and they will provide for you;" or, " have recourse to gambling," or whatever it may be. This is, in fact, " Command that these stones be made bread."

But, my brethren, let the stones remain stones, and expect your bread from Him who has not only promised to provide it, but also to do for you greater things than this.

Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Is it not much better to hunger and fast in the name of God, than to possess abundance in the name of the devil? Your fast-days will cease when they shall have worked out that for which, in the purpose of God, they were designed. Be not dismayed, you are walking in the wilderness, in order that you may see the truth and glory of the Lord, which are beheld better in the dry and thirsty land than in the rich and fertile fields.

There are some among us who derive from their profession of religion ignominy and shame, and know but little joy and comfort. It would be strange if Satan did not present himself, and endeavor to persuade you to suspect the whole of your religion, or to seek that joy which you cannot find in God, in the world, and the things thereof. My brethren, it is the devil who gives you such counsel, and who would move you in a manner inconsistent with the religion of Jesus, to change into bread the stones of your suffering and sorrow.

We should, I think, prefer, if needs be, to pass the time of our sojourning here in the wilderness with Jesus, to suffer with him, and then participate in his glory; and should cheerfully leave those poisoned viands which the devil delights to prepare for us, to those who shall burn and howl for ever with the prince of darkness in the lake of fire.

" The Lord rebuke thee," be our cry, whenever we perceive this serpent crawling near our feet.

Thanks be to God, ever since the true Michael contended with Satan, and cast him to the ground, his power over us has been destroyed. (Jude 1:9; Colossians 2:15.) In his buffeting he may attack us with hand and foot, so that we may totter and fall, but we shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth us with his hand. (Psalms 37:24.) Should the roaring lion prowl around our tents, seeking whom he may devour; (1 Peter 5:8.) the Prince of Peace, the Captain of our Salvation, holds him by the power of his might, and assigns him the limits beyond which he cannot pass.

Let us hide ourselves only in the wounds of Christ. (Exodus 33:22.) In this strong tower we are safe, and may well rejoice. (Proverbs 18:10) 8. THE WEAPONS AND THE VICTORY OF CHRIST. The weapons with which our Lord achieved the victory, were the Word of God ■ " It is written" ■

and Satan was overcome, his purpose was frustrated. The Bible is the arsenal of the heroes of God, the spiritual armoury, whose walls are thickly studded with shields and coats of mail, and rich with swords and glittering spears. Whoever has triumphed in the spiritual conflict, equipped himself here. Hence were taken the sling-stones, which felled the Goliaths to the ground.

He that has access to this spiritual armoury is powerful in the camp. Of these weapons Satan is afraid, and it has been his unremitting endeavor, either to despoil or conceal the word of God, or to destroy its effects. To what expedients has not this cunning sophist resorted; what has he not brought forward and industriously circulated, to throw suspicion on the word or render it ambiguous, and thus to rob men of the pure unadulterated Scriptures of truth!

What false assertions has he not made under the high-sounding title of exposition, to impugn the authenticity and genuineness of the Bible! There is not a single book in the Scriptures, the authority of which this malicious fiend has not attempted to shake, not a miracle which he has not stamped as a fable, not a promise which he has not endeavored to weaken and nullify. And he is still always employed, either through his instruments and servants, false prophets, professors, and others; or in his own person, by his immediate influence ■ ever is he doing his utmost to bring into question the purity of the word of God; for this word is his stumbling-block. But spurn him with abhorrence, turn your back upon him whenever he opens his accursed mouth, for he is a murderer of souls, and has been so from the beginning, a liar, and the father of lies. (John 8:44.) But in what way, you ask, can the word of God afford such important service in the hour of temptation? I will inform you.

Whenever the devil would lead us astray, his first and chief concern is to confuse our ideas. That which is perverted he sets before us as right, that which is human as divine, and evil he calls good, and good evil. Truth he represents as falsehood, and falsehood as truth. And when he has so deceived and dazzled us, we become subservient to his will, perhaps, when we think that we are doing what is right. But these villainous spells and deceptions can profit him little, when we rest in faith on the word of God, which then secures us from deception and misapprehension. For it declares to us most distinctly what is right and wrong, true and false; what, under all circumstances we should do, or think, or say, in accordance with the will of God. Examples will illustrate my meaning.

Satan would mar the labour of a preacher of the Gospel, and weaken its effect. He sets about his design with subtlety. He suggests to him that he should preach a little more smoothly, that he should not make the way so narrow, nor the gate so strait ■ and thus he may gain the friendship of the whole congregation.

Yes, and many whom he has now only made refractory, he may then easily win to the truth. When once this pleasing commencement has been made, the wicked one knows well how to back his counsels. Does the preacher now take this matter into consideration, and has he no other shield than his own good thoughts, then is he soon ensnared. The propositions of the devil appear most reasonable and good, for Satan is wiser than he. But let him rest by faith on the word of God, and believingly reply, It is written," Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life,' (Matthew 7:14.) " It is written," ' Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8.) What can the devil do now? This confidence in the word of God, this faith, is to him as the fire of artillery,

which he cannot sustain ■ it compels him to retreat.

Take another example. Satan would have you believe, that the religion of Jesus is not the only way of salvation. And how does he go to work? With consummate skill. He carries you in spirit to a high place, and shows you the millions of souls who, both in the Christian and heathen world, live without Christ; and thus he begins his discourse: " Tell me, shall all these be lost? To such a supposition neither your reason nor your heart will assent. But they do not believe in Christ, at least, as you and persons of your stamp believe in him. Can Christ then really be the only way of salvation? Can that which you call the new birth, be necessary, without any limitation, for the salvation of mankind? Have you not then been accustomed to entertain too contracted, too confined views respecting salvation?"

Thus doth he speak. Are you, with your reason, alone upon the battle-field, you cannot escape from this snare. His illusions will prove successful, he will assuredly triumph over you; the ground on which you stand will easily be made to rock beneath your feet. But if you can wield the weapons of heavenly temper, if you can boldly oppose to the evil one the word of God, and in faith say to him, " It is written," " Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' (John 3:3.) ■ " It is written," ' I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me' ■ " It is written," few there be that find this way,' (Matthew 7:14.) ' few are chosen.' (Matthew 20:16.) ■ If you can believingly hold fast by these divine declarations, then is the devil stricken to the ground, his net is broken; he will desist from his endeavor to persuade you that Christ is not the only ground of salvation. His remaining hope then, is to throw suspicion upon the word itself, on which you rely.

Again, Satan would draw you back to the world. And what is his method of proceeding? He gently approaches you, and insinuates that it is not right to seclude yourself from the world, and apparently desire to shun so completely the society of others, it does not well accord with the brotherly love which should obtain among Christians. You must sometimes repair to worldly circles, to let your light shine there, and men will see that the religion of Christ by no means converts its possessors into morose monks and hermits, but makes them cheerful, that they may thus win men to Christ. Yes, and for your own sake also, to exercise and confirm yourself in holiness, you must not withdraw altogether from the world, for to be holy where there are no solicitations to sin is an easy matter; but to walk in the sight of the wicked, and to refuse compliance with their evil courses, this is indeed to be righteous. So doth the subtle one reason, and it pleaseth the old man well. (Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9.) Do you venture to dispute with him, you are not his equal; he will soon bring you under, and gain the field. For no doctor or professor is more skilled in disputation than he. He can make the most absurd things appear to be plausible and excellent. But should you be able, meet him in faith with the word of God; should you, for instance, in such a case, say, " It is written," " Love not the world." (1 John 2:15.) then can he do no more. You have cut off the hands of Dagon. (1 Samuel 5:4.)

Thus is the word of God, when grasped and wielded in faith, the all-powerful sword of the Spirit, by which we may subdue the wicked one. (Ephesians 6:17.)

" Yes, the ten commandments" says one, " if written in our heart, and we give utterance to them against him, will speedily repel him." They are like the clubs of Sampson, tenfold, or ten swords of Michael against the roaring lion.

How then did the Lord obtain the victory? Satan counseled him to command that the stones should be made bread, and that thus, by an act of his own power, he might appease his hunger. This was a cunning and ensnaring device, as he well knew.

There were (to speak after the manner of men) many things which tended to move the Lord Jesus to consent to this advice, and in that case, as we have remarked, the work of redemption would at once have been destroyed. But he hearkened not to the suggestion. He left the stones to remain stones, and continued to hunger.

What did Jesus make use of in delivering himself from the snares which were laid for him? It was the Word of God. On that word his eye rested. It is written, in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the third verse, "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." This he grasped in faith, and opposed to the tempter. And in this promise he found abundant ground of confidence.

Better to suffer hunger forty days and nights more, and even longer, than by a distrustful act of power of his own to forestall the aid of the Father. God can sustain me without bread, he has led me into the wilderness, I hope in him. This was his thought ■ in truth, an impenetrable breastplate. The devil was now obliged to devise other projects. The hope he had entertained to persuade Jesus to an act of compliance, that he might avoid the sufferings connected with the atonement for the transgression of Adam, had now at once and for ever vanished. For Jesus believed the declaration of the word, that God could, even in the bitterest season of want, without bread feed him, and without water give him drink, and, through the bare word of his mouth, could support and maintain him. Against this faith must all the darts of the devil be shivered, as against an iron bulwark. The words with which Jesus prevailed are written, as it has been said, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses spake them to the children of Israel, on the borders of the pleasant land, when he recalled to their minds the faithfulness and truth with which God had led them for forty years through the wilderness. " And thou shalt remember," he said, " all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know, that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, doth man live." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Yes, the Lord needs not the mill or the oven for the supply of his children; he can rain upon them bread from heaven, as he did in the wilderness. He can give it them in the night, when the little ones are at rest.

He did so at Cherith, (1 Kings 17:5.) he did so at Zarephath, (1 Kings 17:9.) by means of a widow-woman, and in many other places. It is a small thing to him.

It is not the bread we eat, for the support of our bodies, that is essential to our life, but it is that spiritual food which his word, his will, and his blessing, supply through the outward means. It is only when God wills that bread can nourish us; otherwise it is of no benefit, we are poor and weak in the midst of abundance.

Since, therefore, the quality of sustaining life does not belong to the bread, but depends on the will of God alone, we can easily understand how, with five loaves and two fishes, Jesus could feed

and satisfy five thousand men; (Matthew 14:17-21.) and, with a cake of barley bread, could give his servant strength for forty days and forty nights; (1 Kings 19:8.) yea, how he supports so many poor families. The Lord needs not any bread to sustain us when it pleases him. His word only is enough, and we live. Without bread did Moses subsist on Sinai, and Jesus in the wilderness, and so have many, many others.

It needs but his word, and the air which we breathe is changed into milk, and wine, and we eat the richest fare, and drink only strength and refreshment, without opening the lips ■ without sitting at table, or moving the hand. This is meant by the expression ■ " Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." In times of persecution thousands of the children of God have experienced this, in its literal sense; the believing poor continually do so, and it is true ■ as true as that the living God dwelleth in heaven.

Let all of us, therefore, who suffer need, lay hold of this truth, that it may preserve us from fear and discouragement, and that it may protect us against the assaults of the wicked one.

It has pleased God, in his providence, to reduce many among us to great necessity. They have begun to suffer want in every thing ■ in labour and its recompense, and perhaps also in prospect and credit. They are deep in the wilderness among the stones, and there is sighing among them by night and by day. Steal and defraud they will not; God will graciously preserve them from such crimes. But Satan would obtain much advantage, if the thought only gained place in your breasts ■ " God has forsaken us; now must we see, how we can provide for ourselves?" Satan would be well pleased if you only yielded to the distrustful care and anxiety ■ " What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" or if you adopted the notion that God has given you a sign, by the necessity which presses upon you, that you may endeavor to free yourselves from distress, by having recourse to some venturous speculation, or by the chances of play, or by some artifice, or any other improper means. Yes, then would the tempter have already succeeded well.

Brethren, though much embarrassed, permit not to the adversary such a triumph. Meet him with the weapons which your Master bore against him, and which thus, as by special consecration, have acquired holiness and strength; and say in faith, " It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeih out of the mouth of God." This is the word of him that is faithful and true. Hold fast this word, build thereon, and wait ■ wait only a little in the wilderness. He will never leave you nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5.)

There are some, I could mention them by name, who have been in greater straits than you. They have believed that word with unshaken confidence. Whenever the wicked one has harassed them with his cursed counsels, they have, in this faith, with resolution and firmness, repelled him, and trusted in the Lord. Now is their mouth filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing. The Lord hath done great things for them, whereof they are glad. (Psalms 126:2-3) They would not exchange for mountains of gold and silver the experience which they then acquired in the wilderness. They have seen the glory of the Lord, and have themselves become living witnesses that " man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’

" If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." So said the tempter. He required that Jesus should give proof of his Sonship. But our Lord chose rather to leave this demonstration to the Father.

O, my brethren, may it in every case be the same with you. God will make it manifest that you are his children, not, perhaps, by causing you to live in houses of affluence, but by enabling you with confidence and joy to sing praises among the stones and juniper trees in the wilderness, and supporting you by the word which proceedeth out of his mouth.

9. THE SECOND TEMPTATION. The first temptation of our Lord was a total failure. Whether Jesus were the Son of God, Satan could not yet decide; and if he were so, the tempter had not succeeded in moving Him a finger-breadth from his mediatorial path. The devil makes preparation for a second assault. " He taketh him up into the holy city, and sitteth him on a pinnacle of the temple." Perhaps only in vision? No, corporeally, as the scriptural account compels us to believe. Our Lord was borne through the air in a moment, by supernatural power, and conveyed to the holy city, and then hurried with the swiftness of lightning upwards to the flat roof of one of the projecting wings of the temple, on the declivity of the mountain. The same power with which " the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" from the desert of Gaza, was here granted to the evil spirit for the occasion. (Acts 8:39.) As an eagle with his prey, so fled the prince of darkness with the Lord of Glory. This was awfully terrible; but Jesus was willing to endure the most horrible, and encounter the most fearful things, that he might drink for us, to the dregs, the cup of trembling, and leave nothing of our ransom unpaid, even to the uttermost farthing’.

He was willing to be the sport of the evil spirit in his accursed hands, that the angels of God might bear us sinners in the arms of tenderness to Abraham’s bosom. Did our Lord know that it was the angel of darkness with whom he had to do? I think not. It appears to have been hidden from him by the sacred counsel of God, that the temptation might be the more severe, and the victory the greater and more glorious.

Behold our Saviour now, upon the pinnacle of the temple, with Satan at his side. A giddy abyss is beneath their feet. Deep under them lies the city; yet deeper in the valley, as a little streak, flows with rapid course the brook of Kidron.

Satan assumes the mien and aspect of the best intentioned friend, who, if Jesus were indeed the Son of God, had with him one and the same purpose, and desired nothing so earnestly as that the work of redemption should be speedily accomplished.

He points down to the fearful abyss, and says unto Jesus, " If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." Perhaps he added still more, " Behold, I earnestly desire to know whether thou art the Son of God; I await only for the certainty, to bow my knee immediately, and pay my homage. I am not the only one who, with intense eagerness, awaits the unveiling of thy person and glory. Thou shalt be a king and ruler over a great people as soon as it shall please thee to unfold thy kingly majesty and power. See, here is an opportunity, cast thyself down from this eminence. This miracle will astonish the world; no more doubt will then be entertained as to thy Godhead, and every knee shall be bent in the dust. Thou shalt be as God. And not others only will be convinced, but thyself also wilt arrive at perfect certainty that thou art the Messiah, and that God has not forsaken thee, as he appears to have done since the commencement of thy suffering from hunger in the

wilderness."

Something of this kind might the devil represent to him; and with the more certainty, to attain his purpose, he quotes that blessed promise in the ninety-first Psalm, " He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." The plan is well conceived, and the trial severe. Yes, the seducer appears to be an angel of light, and his counsel good, and well suited for the purpose.

Behold, then, our Lord upon the fearful summit of the temple. How will he act? One step forwards and he treads the air ■ the angels bear him gently to the ground; the people cry aloud, " Hosanna!" he is the object of their wonder, astonishment, and worship ■ but shipwreck is made of the work of our redemption for ever; for the Priest has then forsaken the path of poverty and abstinence ■ the Mediator has acted in opposition to the plan and counsel of God ■ the Lamb is not without blemish ■ it is polluted with sin, it is unfit to be presented as the offering of atonement.

O moment big with the destiny of a world! Yet, thanks be to God, Jesus detected the deep artifice. He well knew, indeed, that the angels would bear him up. But should he, therefore, call in question the faithfulness and power of God? No, no; never. His holy soul shrunk back from the snare which Satan had laid for him.

One word of the Bible suffices to discomfit the wicked one. A second brings him to a stand, to shield and spear ■ " It is written again, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The command is uttered. The Lord hath said it; and the devil is again smitten to the ground.

10. SPIRITUAL HEIGHTS. The holy city, the spiritual Jerusalem, is ever the scene of Satan’s subtlety and most cunning assaults. It is also the field of his most splendid conquests. O, may it soon be otherwise!

Temptations are always at hand, and men are even now, through the devices of Satan, placed in circumstances, as to spiritual things, which greatly resemble the trial of our Lord on the pinnacle of the temple. These are spiritual heights. The best and most happy condition upon earth is unquestionably this, to abide, ’ as a worm,’ at the feet of Jesus, poor in spirit; with Lazarus to lie at the rich man’s door; and with the woman of Canaan to desire, as a dog, only the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table. And it is well to be thus, for then shall we become rich. Here alone are we secure. No wonder then that the wicked one is intent on nothing more eagerly than to entice the children of God from this state of humility and spiritual poverty. And many are the devices to which he has recourse to effect his purpose. Let me place before you one or two of them.

Clothed as an angel of light, he comes to you, and carries you into the holy city, that is, he sets before your spiritual vision all the gifts, and graces, and privileges, of which you may become partakers in the kingdom of heaven, so that you imagine it is a holy angel who enables you to see these glorious sights. And now the enemy brings forward one of these gifts; for example, that of the Holy Ghost, and begins to explain to you all that you may gain by this gift; how the Holy Ghost will sanctify (Romans 15:16.) and enlighten you; (John 16:14.) how he will guide you into all truth; (John 16:13.) reveal unto you the deep things of God; (1 John 2:27.) will lead and move you; (Romans 8:14.) will speak and witness within you; (1 John 5:6.) and so on, in accordance with that which is written. But the devil proceeds farther, and seeks to persuade you that the Spirit will reveal new things unto you, which the Bible only incidentally or partially contains, or perhaps not at

all. He goes farther, and teaches you to regard your own thoughts as those which are suggested by the Spirit; and yet still farther, and declares that you are inspired, one who has no more need for the outer light from the letter, since you have such inward illumination; and, alas! before you are aware, you are transported to the pinnacle of the temple.

You feel yourself exalted on high, above the word and the testimony of God, above the church and ministry of the gospel; you behold all these things, together with the whole of Jerusalem, all other believers lying deep at your feet; and if you are not seized with dizziness on this painful elevation, and finish your course in the horrible abyss of madness, it is to the unbounded grace of God alone that you are beholden for your preservation. And such wiles as these have before now succeeded in ensnaring the souls of some, who would no longer conform to any prescribed order, or permit themselves to be ruled by the word of God, conceiving that they were led by the Spirit, which had testified to them of higher and better things. Truly, there may have been those among them, who were in reality pious men, and who would again be recovered to the right path, but still it is a melancholy and distressing misconception. May God preserve us from such illusions. But to proceed, " It is written" ■ "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8-9) " It is written" ■ " Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalms 119:105.) Such an appeal to the word of God puts to flight the wicked one.

If Satan gains not his point in one way, he tries another, and he does not desist till he has had recourse to all his expedients.

We see many standing on the pinnacle of the temple, and various are the means by which they have been transported thither.

One indulges the pleasing fancy, that he understands all mysteries, that he is gifted with a spiritual illumination beyond others, that he carries about him the keys of David, The devil has made a prey of him through the abundance of his knowledge, and with wicked enchantment has persuaded him to believe that he hath the anointing and knoweth all things. (1 John 2:27.)

Another regards himself as the man who, with the sword of his mouth, shall slay the wicked, who, with the sceptre of his word, shall sway the minds of men, and after whom no one dares to speak. His ability in teaching and preaching has become, by the subtlety of the wicked one, a trap and a snare. A third arrogates to himself the proud per-eminence of being, with reference to God, far apart from others, as if he sat on a seat in the kingdom of Christ twice as high as other poor sinners. Perhaps it was the gift of prayer he possessed, from which the enemy prepared him the sweet poison. In a fourth the notion has firmly fixed itself, that without him the kingdom of God cannot stand. He is a pillar without his equal on earth; an apostle, an Elijah of his day. The blessing which God granted to his word and testimony, has been made, through the artifice of the devil, into a lime-twig, on which he has been caught. The dreams and chimeras of a fifth has Satan magnified into pure visions and manifestations from heaven. Now the poor creature deems himself a seer and a prophet.

Before the eyes of a sixth the devil holds his magic mirror, in which the weak mortal sees himself with a halo of glory round his head; or the deceiver sends to him friends, who represent that his

meekness and patience, his faith or his love, must be extolled and admired, and even idolized by men; and then the poor deluded soul enters into the full persuasion that God most certainly intends to set him forth as an example of holiness.

Behold, these are the heights, the pinnacles of the temple, to which Satan conducts men. And the evil does not stop here; for let the deceived souls but once stand upon these heights, and imagine themselves apostles, saints, and prophets, then they sometimes step higher. It is not all of them who come down again without having first Sustained injury. Alas! some fall from these heights down into the depths of mental aberration. Of such unhappy ones, who at length have supposed themselves to be God, or Christ, or the Holy Ghost, every age has afforded instances, and that even in the midst of the holy city.

Brethren, abide in your strong tower, and lie in the dust; above all, those of you who are rich in gifts, and apt to teach; those who are held in reputation among the brethren, and who publicly instruct in the congregation; those of you who lead the assembly of the pious, and whose light shines with especial splendor in Zion. Such things readily present to the dragon that which he can seize, and by which he can rapidly transport you to the heights.

Gird as a breast-plate on your bosom the words of Christ, " Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3.)

Place as a helmet on your head that truth, " Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." (Mark 10:15.)

Take as a sword in your hand that word, " God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the lowly." (James 4:6.) And never forget that the golden rose of Jesus does not bloom upon the heights, but in the deep valleys. And should the devil urge you into a presumptuous and perplexing speculation with regard to the unsearchable mysteries of God, should he hurry you into vain and profitless investigations, respecting the Trinity, or eternity, or the two natures of Christ, or whatever else it may be of this description; now collect all your powers, and cry aloud to him, " It is written," ' We know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.' (1 Corinthians 13:9-10.) Declare to him, in the name of Jesus, that you desire to know nothing more than that which is necessary for your salvation, and thus you will drive him away.

11. " IF THOU BE THE SON OF GOD, CAST THYSELF DOWN." That the devil eagerly makes use of our relation to God, to move us the more readily to all kinds of wicked compliances, is an acknowledged truth. Has Satan learned, for instance, that you have yet a sin that is dear to you, and which has not been renounced and overcome; he brings you into circumstances which not only supply incentives to that sin, but also the opportunity of indulging it. Then you stand on the brink of a precipice. " Cast thyself down," whispers the devil, " thou shalt escape." You hesitate. He adds, "it is so pleasant below." You are still reluctant. " Cast thyself down," he cries yet louder. You tremble at the danger, and yet cannot withdraw from the spot, and are as one enchanted. "Cast thyself down," proceeds the wicked one: " thou art a child of God; thou canst again find grace." He so speaks, and if God do not hold you back, the leap is taken.

You are by nature of an irascible disposition. Some one in your household disturbs you. You are greatly stirred up to yield to anger and revenge, but you know not whether you dare. You are on

the edge of a pit. " Cast thyself down," cries the devil, " Thou art a child of God, and between the children of God and the world there should be no peace, but a sword and division. (Matthew 10:34.) Give scope to thy passions." Thus he counsels, and before he has spoken, you are boiling, perhaps, with wrath, and heaping sin upon sin.

You are in great straits, and are weary of life. The devil sets you upon the top of your house, or upon the edge of a cliff, or on the shore of the deep sea. 0, how dreadful is your position! " Cast thyself down," whispers the evil one. You are inclined to do so, yet you shrink from such a plunge. " Why dost thou linger?" cries the tempter. " ’ Cast thyself down.’ In the arms of death there is sweet repose, and all suffering will cease. ’ Cast thyself down.’ Thou standest by grace, and grace never is lost, even though the mountains should depart and the hills be removed. (Isaiah 54:10.) ’ Cast thyself down.’ Hasten to thy home." Thus the serpent. ■ O frightful! you waver ■ you cast your eyes downward: the desire is great, the impulse strong, the means before you; and O! if the hand of divine mercy do not interpose to save you, you rush into eternity.

Satan tempted the Lord Jesus, that he might, in a way not approved of God, namely, by a voluntary leap from the pinnacle of the temple, give evidence that he was the Son of God. And thus also does he draw near to believers.

Doubts are entertained as to your state of grace. He whispers to you, ’ Men hesitate to reckon you one of the children of the kingdom. Prove to them what you are." Now it is high time to wield the sword of the Spirit against the tempter, to meet him with the word, "The Lord knoweth them that are his;" (2 Timothy 2:19.) and to let that suffice. But in such circumstances some fall into grievous errors.

One is guilty of shameful falsehood, inasmuch as he boasts of spiritual experiences which he has not really attained.

Another yields to criminal impulses, since he speaks of frames of mind, in his own case, which God alone can produce, and which he does not possess. This man acts with scandalous dissimulation, whilst he hypocritically arrogates to himself the anointing which has not yet been granted him, even for a moment. That man is stained with black impurity, because he endeavors to make men believe that the works which he has done by his own act have been wrought in him by the Spirit of God. And what abominations can be greater in the eyes of God than these?

Well may the devil insultingly laugh, when he succeeds in casting the children of God into such a sink as this.

" Cast thyself down," said Satan, and would add the reason, viz. that thereby he might carry forward the purposes and the counsel of God. And earnestly did he desire to excite in the mind of Jesus any degree of impatience as to the slow progress of his work of redemption.

And! how gladly would he stir up in believers the motions of impatience; how eagerly does he spur them on to self-imposed exercises, in order to perfect their holiness, and urge them to endeavor, by rapid strides, to mount to the highest step of the ladder in the attainment of their individual glory. With what importunity does he call to them to " leap down and choose the shortest way;" for the base deceiver is well aware that such a hurrying forwards is only a falling back, since it is a turning away from the throne of grace and the blood of the Lamb, and he knows that in such ways,

of our own choosing, no angels will bear us in their hands, but that we shall only dash our feet against the stones, and that we shall fall into darkness, pride, and self-sufficiency. Are they witnesses and ministers of the word whom he thus deceives? O, how doth he rejoice when they think the time long till God shall crown their labours, and how sedulously doth he cherish this impatience in their souls, and with what delight doth he cry, " Cast thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple." And with what exultation doth he look on when they obey his voice, and endeavor, with their own wildfire, to kindle the desires of the congregation, and with fleshly tumult to excite the people, so to speak, to take the kingdom of heaven by storm, and whilst God doeth it not, to gird themselves, to anoint and equip themselves for the war. This is a day of rejoicing to the devil, for he knows that now at least he has succeeded, and that under such dark and earthly impulses the Holy Ghost will not make himself known.

Those by whom the Lord will execute his purposes of mercy are broken instruments, and are submissive to the will of their God, and are cheerfully led and directed by the Saviour. And this is as it should be. Violence and precipitation can effect nothing in this great work.

12. SATAN ARMED WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

" If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." So spake the devil to Jesus ■ a most difficult task. But the children of God have dared to attempt deeds of greater peril. Peter ventured, notwithstanding its rage, to walk upon the stormy sea; (Matthew 14:29.) and the three children recorded in Daniel, encountered the burning fiery furnace; and they suffered no injury. (Daniel 3:27.) In all things is it given in command to the angels of God, to bear us up in their hands. They are attached to us, as a body-guard and safe-conduct, on whose guidance and protection, in all the way in which God has commanded us to go, it is our privilege joyfully to reckon.

Relying on that promise, Jesus might have cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple; but he did it not. And why? Because God had not expressly directed him. Scarcely was the satanic suggestion made, when probably the divine promise presented itself to the soul of Jesus. " No, thought the pure Lamb, for such self-chosen way is the promise not given," and if Satan said, "The Lord will give his angels charge concerning thee," our Lord repelled him with weapons taken out of the heavenly armoury of the word; "Jesus said unto him, it is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;" and again was Satan vanquished. But what is meant by tempting God? It is that which we have described, namely, voluntarily to go into danger, that God may deliver us. To such unworthy courses would the devil endeavor to lead us, and for this purpose he has committed to memory the most striking promises of God, that he may take us by surprise. Therefore, when some word of God is presented to us, to induce us to take some daring step, let us ask, whether this word is suited to our case, and whether we also have a warrant to rest upon it in such circumstances. Thus it will become clear, who has presented to us the word, and Satan will not so easily seduce us.

If a man comes to you, and says, "Steer out into those furious breakers, and rescue a brother out of the surge, for it is written, ' When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.' " (Isaiah 43:2.) If he says to you, " Go into that house on fire, and snatch that screaming child out of the flames, for God has said, When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' " (Isaiah 43:2.) Do you hear a voice within you, saying, " Give to that poor hungry soul your last

penny, for it is written, ’ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’ " (Matthew 25:40.) Then, my friend, gird yourself in the name of God, and do so. A good angel speaks to you, and you may reasonably expect all help. But should another approach you, and say, " Come, friend, into this or that gay society, for it is written, ’ He will keep the feet of his saints.’" (1 Samuel 2:9.) Is it said to you, " only go ■ venture it once ■ take delight in it, without any care as to the consequences, for it is written, ’ he giveth to his beloved sleeping.’" (Psalms 127:2. German version.) Then know that it is a crafty devil, with whom you have to do; and answer him, " It is written, again, ’ thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’ "

There are many snares of the devil, such as these, taken from the word of God. To this class belongs that accursed temptation, by which he entices us to make trial of this or that divine declaration, whether it holds good, and thus to bring under examination, as it were, the faithfulness and truth of the Lord. So once, for example, did a villainous device of his succeed with three ministers of the word. He placed before their eyes, the eighteenth chapter of Matthew and twentieth verse, " Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" and then, that other passage in the preceding verse, " Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven;" and then he asked, " Is it indeed so?" " Ah," thought the preachers, ’ we will put it to the test;" and they appointed an hour for the purpose of praying that the Lord would personally appear. And they came together and prayed, " O Lord, manifest thyself. Lord appear among us;" but he did not appear, and the devil cried out " victory!" His malicious design succeeded. Afterwards the Lord did indeed appear to them, but in a very different manner from that which they had expected. He became unto them as a moth, and as a worm, (see Hosea 5:12. marginal reading,) and to the end of their lives they received no more light, nor joy, nor peace, and a spiritual decline took place, which they could not avert. May God in mercy preserve us from such attempts to prove his faithfulness and truth!

Let the least inclination of the kind, that moves within us, be a token, that we are in an evil case, and let us cry as loud and earnestly as we can, " It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

One of the common devices of Satan is, to shake, if possible, our confidence in the word of God by means of the word itself. Wonderful are the things which we live to behold!

He sets before us, at a glance, a multitude of unimportant things from the Bible. As that Paul wrote to Timothy, desiring him to bring the cloak, which he left at Troas, (2 Timothy 4:13.) and many other circumstances equally trivial. And whilst he is holding them before our view, he asks us, with malicious purpose, " Are these words also inserted by the Spirit?" And then immediately afterwards, " Is not then the whole of the Bible inspired?" And he proceeds further, " What is from the Spirit, and what is not?" And then his conclusion ■ " The Bible is an unsafe foundation. And indeed occasionally, by such jugglers’ artifices, he causes, for a moment at least, the whole Bible-edifice to fall upon our heads, so that all is uncertain and wavering for a time, till at last we recover our recollection. For the purpose of rendering suspected the word of God, he not unfrequently makes a passage of Scripture stand prominently before our eyes, when something occurs in our life, which that word seems to falsify. Are you lying, for example, almost in despair, in great need and bitter trial, and help is as yet afar off? It is probably that word, which he recalls to

your memory, " Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;" (Psalms 103:13.) and then with a fiendish grin, he asks, " Where then is the Father, where is his pity, and why tarries this boasted help?" And what would please the wicked one better, than to pollute your soul with distrust, impatience, and unbelief? When for a long time you have been entreating some mercy, and wrestling with God, be it for bread for your hungry children, for counsel under some pressing embarrassment, or for some alleviation of your pain, or a little comfort in the cup of your anxiety, and you do not receive it ■ Satan is again near. " Behold," says he, " is it not written," ' Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son? (John 14:13) Now, pious worshiper, is your lap already full of the gifts of God?" So mocks the accursed one, and truly, if the Lord hold not his hand over your faith, you cannot escape these fiery darts unwounded. The most dangerous method in which the devil uses the word of God as a weapon against us, is this ■ He dissevers single passages of Scripture from their connection, and instead of interpreting them according to the rule of faith, he presents them apart by themselves, perverts their meaning, and endeavors to show them to us in the same light. Here, certainly, if any where, it is important to encounter him with the weapons of the word, to enter with the sword of the Spirit into the conflict.

" It is written," he says, " ' Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound;' (Romans 5:20.) therefore, let loose the reins, you have full liberty." Say to him in reply, " It is written again, ' Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?'" (Romans 6:1-2.)

" But," cries the devil, " It is written, ' It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me;' (Romans 7:17.) therefore, compose yourself, and be not so distressed about your faults." Say to him in reply, " It is also written," ' wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24.) The children of God mourn over their sins,"

" It is written," rejoins Satan, " that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God, that sheweth mercy;' (Romans 9:16.) therefore, remain in the world and in the enjoyment of pleasure, till God call you." Let your answer be, " I know it, but ' it is written again,' ' work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' " (Php 2:12.) The devil is not backward with a rejoinder ■ " It is written," ' known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,' (Acts 15:18.) therefore, desist from your supplications and prayers, your portion is assigned you; whatever has been decreed to you, you shall certainly receive." Give him this reply, " It is written again, 'Ask and ye shall receive, for every one that asketh, receiveth.' " (Luke 11:9-10.)

" But," says the dragon, " It is written," ' this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.' (John 6:39.) Live then as you like, and do whatsoever your heart desires. What have you to do with Moses and his laws? Your salvation is secured for eternity." Thus cry to him, in reply, " It is written again," ' My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.' " (John 10:27.)

Behold, my brother, thus shouldest thou disarm the devil, and in the strength of thy God triumph over him, and make a shew of him openly.

13. THE MAGIC VISION. The scene of action is changed. With the rapidity of lightning was the Son of God hurried from the pinnacle of the temple, and borne by magic power to the summit of an exceeding high mountain, (Matthew 4:8) Then did he, in mental vision, behold himself placed, as it were, on the highest elevation of a lofty tower, and a boundless prospect, filled with every charm and dazzling beauty lay extended before his eyes in the mirror of a wondrous manifestation. And what followed? In a moment stand forth, within the circle of vision, in brilliant relief, all the kingdoms of the world, with all their glory, delights, and embellishments, in all their alluring forms. Time and space have no longer any limits. That which is distant draws nigh; that which was closed opens itself wide; that which was veiled is exposed to view; and yet it was, as Luke says, (Luke 4:5,) in a moment of time ■ an unheard of delusion of the senses! In this splendid picture, as it is probable, lay the most lovely regions of the earth spread out before him, and around him the most charming prospect of magnificent cities and gorgeous palaces ■ On this side haughty Rome, the victorious mistress of the world, and the ruler over a hundred kings; on the other side the spicy groves of the east, and the lovely rose gardens of Persia ■ Here Ophir, with its rich mines of gold and of diamonds; there India, that land of wonders, abounding with the varied charms of an unfading spring, and flowing with milk and honey. But not kingdoms merely and cities ■ yet other things presented themselves to the view of Jesus. The devil showed him, besides the kingdoms of the world, also their glory.

Whatever this world possesses that is attractive and alluring, whatever delights the senses and commands admiration, and whatever the children of the world call their paradise and their heaven, at once did he behold spread before him ■ Here towering castles and pleasant villas, with their lawns and gardens; there chariots and horses, princely trains and equipages ■ On one spot, galleries of the fine arts and temples of wisdom; on another, monuments of fame and laurel-crowns of honour ■ Yonder, courtly society in golden chambers; nearer at hand the festive throng, amid the alluring tones and seductive power of symphony and song. In short, all that makes the heart leap within the children of this world, and suffuses the cheek, and causes the eyes to glisten with joy and delight, passed then before the view of Jesus ■ a picture that fixed and riveted the attention; and no exhibition calculated to please and excite the feelings would Satan at that time conceal from his sight.

Something similar to this do we also at times experience. Those, namely, among our brethren who possess by nature a lively temperament, an easily excited mind, and a strong imagination, can no doubt speak of such magic visions. Such persons the devil is wont especially to approach with snares like these, since even their susceptible nature itself, and their quick sensibilities, appear to him already to promise a certain victory; at least, he the more easily succeeds in carrying persons of this description to the summit of his magic mountain. For the purpose of effecting this, the tempter generally makes use of outward means. Such means he finds, for example, in the kingdom of the fine arts, in so far as they are made subservient to the world and to sin. At one time he makes use of an exquisite painting or beautiful poem; at another, of sweet and harmonious tones or moving melody, in the midst of which he carries on his enchantments.

So, for instance, is there often need only of some chord, or single tone of a flute, to be wafted in tender undulations from afar into the solitude of our quiet chamber, where it is scarcely audible, and his magic has already begun. As by the creating word of the Almighty, Satan produces in an instant before our view a paradise full of intoxicating joys, and the obstructing veil, as it were,

being removed, the eye roams abroad through an earthly Elysium. The joys of our youth, of which we long had taken leave, present themselves before us in the most attractive form; and earthly pleasures which, perhaps, years ago we had crucified and slain, appear to us again in the most seductive shape and coloring. Here hang crowns of perishable honour, but how highly do we value them. There opens to our view the tumultuous assembly of worldly society and frivolous intercourse; but how many charms does this circle again present to us? The poor soul finds itself powerfully drawn back.

Now open to our view the splendid halls of the great, filled with sound and song, with stringed instruments and the votaries of pleasure, reeling in the dance. And again, the eye rolls over the deceitful rose-beds of human art and sweet poetry. In a word, all things that are beautiful and precious which the world can offer, high in dignity and attractive in grace, as by a stroke of enchantment, stand forth in living images and scenes in the mirror of our imagination; and however vain in themselves, and worthless and pitiful, a magic spell is over them; they are seen in beauteous coloring and adornment, and richest enameling, as if we really looked into Paradise; and an ocean of sensibility, and languishing, and desire begins in a moment, as we gaze at such a spectacle, to move and to heave within our souls, as if a storm were about to burst forth from their depths.

Behold! it is at a moment like this that you are standing upon the high enchanted mountain, and the devil shows you all the kingdoms of the world and their glory in a moment of time. And therefore it is, that the music of the present day, as it is now constituted, is so dangerous a thing, since the devil succeeds so easily in raising, by means of it, the most sinful of the passions. In the operas and concerts of this world does Satan find a means of powerful enchantment, to make the vain glory of the world to outshine that of heaven.

Experienced Christians have acknowledged that, for a moment at least, by means of such wicked and worldly music, they have been so irresistibly hurried along by the devil, as if under the influence of wine, that they have regretted their departure from Egypt, and have envied the children of this world, if not their scenes of rioting and intemperance, at least their higher and more refined pleasures.

Yes; not unfrequently is this most efficacious of all his artifices, one of the wings on which, by the power of the tempter, we are transported to the summit of that mountain whence the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, pass before the eyes of our fancy in a sea of light and golden vapour, and so charm and captivate the senses, that the very elect would be deceived and led aside, were it not that with his favour doth the Lord compass them as with a shield. (Psalms 5:12.) 14. THE DARING PROPOSAL OF THE WICKED ONE. At the very moment when the kingdoms of this world and their glory lay before the eyes of Jesus, in the glare and dazzling splendor of this wondrous vision, did Satan, laying aside his deceptive guise, make known himself, and say, " All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:9.) St. Luke says," All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will, I give it. If thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine." (Luke 4:6-7.) He claims all as his own ■ what daring presumption! And yet, alas! here hath the Father of lies spoken the truth. Through the sentence of a holy God the world for which the great High Priest doth not pray, has been made the portion of Satan. (John 17:9.) He is their prince, (John 12:31;

John 14:30; John 15:11.) their ruler, (Ephesians 6:12.) their Lord. (Isaiah 26:13. 1 Corinthians 8:5.) The great nations of the earth are his, and the great bulk of mankind bear his yoke. The inhabitants of this world pay him tribute, and on the walls of their cities float his sable banners. Who can number the countless millions whose souls he holds in severest bondage, tied and bound with the chains of sin and darkness, and in spiritual prisons and cells, whether Mahometan or heathen, whether Jewish or papistical, whether those of self-sufficient rationalism or daring infidelity.

Yes, without any arrogant pretensions, was he able to say, all these are mine. For the few who are not his, those who are left as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, (Isaiah 1:8.) the worm Jacob, (Isaiah 41:14.) the despised house of Israel, (Jeremiah 33:24.) all these are lost, as nothing among the giant-cities of the fallen prince of angels; they are as the drop in the unfathomable ocean. And what is there in the world, which the devil has not seized and laid under contribution for the purpose of extending and strengthening his kingdom; what has he not made subservient to the furtherance of his wicked plans, especially in the present day? Has he not already in his service the liberal sciences, and their professors, the periodical press, associations, and assemblies in the great world? Have not all these been readily enlisted in his cause? Who has turned the stream of poetry into that flood of romance and drama, which overflows the world with its thousand falsehoods and ungodly imaginations? Who acts so powerful a part in the representation of opera, and in the wanton melodies in which the powers of tone, which ought to be employed in the praises of God, are perverted for the destruction of souls, and to pour into the heart the most subtle poison? Who has pitched his camp among the high-flown systems of new-fangled philosophy, and from these bulwarks and bastions hurled his javelins against the gospel of peace? Who has raked up and and exposed to public gaze that groveling system of the present day, that sweet and effeminate scheme of Esthetics, a corrupt code opposed to the gospel of Christ, and which, as an intoxicating potion, drowns the souls of men in a fatal slumber, from which, it is to be feared, they will awake, alas! only by the thunders of the judgment? Is it not the father of lies, the old serpent, the dragon from the bottomless pit? And let no one be surprised that Satan speaks of a gift which is actually in his own power ■ " All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

There are favors conferred by the wicked one, as there are blessings from heaven, and the world swarms with those who are indebted to him for their enjoyments and honors, their titles and distinctions. Yes, he has his gold, and his rewards for those who thus follow his banners, and know that their zeal in his service will be repaid in many ways; and not unfrequently does God permit these reprobate men so exceedingly to indulge in the pomps and pleasures of this wicked world, and they so feast and fatten in the rich pastures of fleshly enjoyments, that at length the last trace of man is lost in these vessels of wrath, and they go down like beasts into hell.

" All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Thus spake the tempter to our Lord. That the Son of the living God should bow the knee in worship to the old serpent! Oh, it is the most daring, the most frightful proposition that ever has been made. Indeed, it seems as if it were the advice of a maniac, utterly inconsistent with the craft, and subtlety, and unworthy the giant intellect of the prince of darkness. But let any one examine the critical situation in which Satan was then placed, and his shameless accursed suggestion will cease to be a matter of surprise. The mask is now laid aside, for the devil conjectures, with increasing assurance, who it is

that stands before him. The glorious triumphs which, not-withstanding his most subtle devices, our Lord had already achieved over him, left him scarcely the shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the Christ.

Irritated to the utmost, by the failure of his plots against the great opposer of his kingdom, and moved no less by the danger which threatened his dominion over the souls of men, he meditated, in hatred and rage, a last and decisive stroke; but reflection was now chained by the power of passion, and all prudence and discretion were swallowed up in the fiery waves of distracting doubt, which rolled through his soul in wild and horrible confusion. When he became certain as to the person of his antagonist, and not till then, did Satan perceive, in its full extent, the great and vital importance of the conflict; and it was not concealed from him that one or other of them must fall.

Nevertheless, his last attack, however great the skill and power which he had hitherto displayed, is the most ill contrived of all, and with the desperation and impetuosity of a warrior who has given up all as lost, he rushes blindly upon his adversary, and is transfixed by his sword. This blow, which Satan now aimed against Jesus, was the last effort of desperation; by which we perceive, that relinquishing the endeavor to ensnare the Son of God, and drive Him from the field, which was now evidently hopeless, he meant offensively to intimate, by a contemptuous blow, as it were, with the foot, that Jesus must not suppose He could compel all His enemies to bow their necks before Him. With such desperate intentions, and foaming with fury, the devil began his magic jugglery, placed his enchanted mirror before the eyes of Christ, displayed to his view one sight after another of the most lovely regions of the earth, and their glory; and cried to him with grinning scorn and wild satanic derision, " Behold all these things: these delights and enjoyments shall be thine, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Away then, take the rich booty. Down in the dust, and do homage to thy Lord and Master." The supposition may also be entertained, that from the circumstance of our Lord’s refusing to give him the desired evidence, Satan had come to the conclusion that Jesus was not the incarnate Son of God, but only a great saint, yet still a man, against whom, as such, he might, unmasked, press other suggestions, more bold and gross. This Satanic suggestion was, as has been said, an act of desperation, and more an outbreak of vicious rage and satanic scorn than a temptation.

Believers also have frequently the same to suffer from the devil which their Master encountered in the wilderness, whilst he tempts them with the most abominable propositions, and infuses such blasphemous and detestable thoughts into their souls, that they shudder at their enormity. But be comforted and undismayed, ye oppressed souls. That the wicked one thus buffets and spurns you, arises from pure vexation and disappointment, that he is not able to swallow you up. Look upon these temptations as the revengeful vaporing of a powerless enemy, who, since he cannot prevail with sword and sling, throws mire and filth, to irritate you, at least; and if he cannot succeed by other means, endeavors, in this way, to give vent to his rage.

15. THE ISSUE OF THE CONFLICT.

Scarcely had Jesus received the blasphemous counsel ■ scarcely had he glanced into the mirror of earthly glory and pleasure, which the devil had the insolence to hold before him ■ when it was fully manifest with whom he had to do. " These are thy possessions, thy kingdoms," thought he, " and thou requires to be worshiped? Thou art detected, thou foul spirit, the mask is fallen off, I know thee." With horror and disgust, the pure soul of the great High Priest turned away from the

images of vanity and lust which Satan had conjured up before him. He grasped the iron shield of the word of God, against which all the fiery darts of the wicked one are quenched, and spake with the majesty of the first-born, to whom is given all power, both in heaven and in earth ■ " Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matthew 4:10) Then did not the devil dare a second time to arrogate to himself divine honour ■ he was stricken to the ground ■ the battle was ended; and the Lamb of God stood pure, without spot, victorious ■ the triumph achieved. With the sword of the Spirit, the written word ■ in the obedience of faith ■ did Jesus lay the dragon completely in the dust. The temptation over which our Lord here came off victorious, not unfrequently is presented to his beloved children.

We have already remarked how Satan is able sometimes to show us, in his magic mirror, the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, in a moment of time. O yes; even the most holy upon earth must be conscious, that in the experience of the children of God, either hours or moments may sometimes occur, when the enjoyments and seductive allurements which they supposed to have been long before, by the grace of God, utterly dead, are again exhibited in the most attractive light before the eye of their imagination. Then does the sea of their senses and desires become impetuous and raging, and Satan leaves nothing untried, that he may drown the poor soul in this flood. At such moments it is said to us quickly, unexpectedly, before we can recollect ourselves, ’ All this will I give thee if thou fall down and worship me." Behold, we have only to do some little thing to gain all those golden mountains; it is only a little turning aside, of which, perhaps, no man may be aware; only a momentary prostration before the tempter; only a transient homage, and all is ours. And 0, my beloved, David and Solomon are not the only ones among the children of God who have been guilty of such a fall, that they might once more drink of the intoxicating cup of earthly pleasure.

Yet, in whatever way these falls may have taken place, we feel deeply for our brethren who have been so surprised, and we contemn them not. No, we do not despise them; for we know our hearts, and are aware what we are, and how the tempter can paint the world so beautifully before the eyes of man, and give such enchanting coloring to its vanities. We are aware of this, and our prayer is, every moment, " Lead us not into temptation."' The wicked one, indeed, cannot be concealed when he draws near to us with such visions and shameless propositions. The enjoyments and treasures which he presents to us, and describes so glowingly, and the means which he proposes, by which we may become possessed of the same, betray him. In such temptations as these he approaches us, not as an angel of light, but without the mask, and boldly. We then soon know who is our adversary, and this renders the struggle more easy.

We cannot, indeed, retire from the scene of conflict unwounded as Jesus; and seldom, without any motions of sinful inclination, can we withdraw from the sight of those seducing enchantments. And well is it for us if we only escape before that lust hath conceived and brought forth sin, (James 1:15.) and if unscathed, we can quit the field. The weapons with which our Lord so easily repelled the last onset of the tempter are ours also, under similar circumstances ■ " It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." This word, when uttered in faith against the devil, will break his strongest darts, as though they were stubble. And as often as he sees this armour flashing upon our breasts, his hopes will languish, and he can only attempt to move us to do him reverence, and fall down for a moment at his feet.

" Then the devil leaveth Him, and behold angels came and ministered unto him." (Matthew 4:11) This was the termination of this great and most important conflict; and never has Satan fled from any field of battle with such feelings of discomfiture; never has he, with a soul so torn and distracted, quitted an antagonist as at that time he must have left the fearful opponent of his kingdom. For to be so bruised upon the head, and to be compelled to lay down his weapons with so much shame, was as insupportable as it was strange to him. (Genesis 3:15.) As a dark cloud of the night, which the stormy wind drives, he hurried away, his fiery eyes rolling in desperation, and gnashing his teeth; and gladly would he cry to the mountains and hills to fall upon him, and cover him both from heaven and hell, that he might not hear the triumph of the angels over him, nor be upbraided by the hollow murmurings and howling cries of the spirits of hell at such a shameful overthrow. But our Lord is safe. O how pleasing must it have been for him, after having been left, most fearfully, forty days, with the powers of darkness; (for Luke tells us, Luke 4:2, that he is forty days tempted of the devil,) now suddenly to find himself in his own element again amid the blessed angels of God, who had come to pay their homage, and to minister to the mighty conqueror.

Then was fulfilled that which, in prophetic anticipation, the dying Jacob spake, " Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he Stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? (Genesis 49:9.)

Yet this cessation from strife was not the end of the battle, hut only a short respite. Satan, says Luke, departed from him for a season. (Luke 4:13.) It was not long before he again stood before Jesus in full array, in the plain, and he continued to follow him with his slings and other missiles, till the great Sampson vanquished him by his own death on Golgotha, and tore for ever the sceptre from his hands. (Judges 16:30; Colossians 2:15.) When the blood of the Lamb of God stained the accursed tree, then was the head of the serpent bruised according to the promise. (Genesis 3:15.) Our life, also, beloved children of the cross, will prove a scene of conflict even to the end. Days of repose and rejoicing will not be wanting to us in the wilderness, but the full unbroken Sabbath awaits us in the heavenly Canaan, in that rest which remaineth to the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9.) As long as we dwell in these pilgrim-tents, the devil will not suffer his sword to rest in the scabbard ■ the roaring lion will not cease to go about seeking whom he may devour. And when he shall cease to triumph over us, yet will he not desist from his attempts, nor suffer his wrath to cool; but, by buffeting and otherwise assaulting us, he will cause us to feel his hatred and his scorn. But let us not fear. " Thanks be to God," we may joyfully exclaim with St. Paul, " Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57.) The victories of our Surety are all ours through faith. We have already triumphed before the conflict ■ and when also the dust of our strife with the powers of darkness covers the battle-field, and the fiery darts by thousands hiss around our heads, even when we fall in death, we remain victorious, and become more than conquerors through him that hath loved us.

Thrice blessed truth! Inestimable faith! Whosoever walketh by this faith, his courage will never fail, and though he may fall in the struggle, yet shall he rise again, and stand erect, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. (Psalms 37:24; Micah 7:8.)

" Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou

shalt tread upon their high places." (Deuteronomy 33:29.)

FINIS.

01.9. Authors Bio

F.W. (Frederick Wilhelm)Krummacher: A short Biography, obtained from: http://www.pleasantplaces.biz/authors/krummacher_fw.php

Frederick Wilhelm Krummacher was born in Prussia in 1796. He held a pastorate in Germany but firmly held the old Lutheranism, renouncing rationalism. He came to New York in 1843, but turned down offers to return to Germany in 1847 and settled in Berlin. He died in Prussia on December 10, 1868. He was a prolific writer and is best known for his book, Elijah the Tishbite. For information on Krummacher's father, background and early years, see the article on Frederick Adolphus Krummacher . In 1813, Krummacher found it difficult to apply himself to his studies, when the battle for freedom had entered the very streets of their city. Finally, his father permitted him to join a new company that formed in the town, even though Krummacher was barely 16 years old. They assembled and went to an inn to await orders. Finally the word came from the Serene Highness that the boys were to return to their studies, and at a later time, they would be called to duty, if needed. Studies were very difficult, especially as they had to study the great battles of history, and they could not join their countrymen who were valiantly fighting for freedom. Finally Krummacher was promoted to Sergeant of a rifle/lance company, and it seemed they might join the efforts. Instead they were made singers of the gained victories at Gross-Beeren, Katzbach, and Leipzig.

Krummacher and his fellows decided to apply themselves and see the glory of mastering the sciences in school, but it was not easy. His parents had a steady flow of soldiers that quartered in their home. One became a famous surgeon, who was very intelligent and an enjoyable conversationalist. They also had fellows that became famous persons: a painter, a poet, an archaeologist, theologians, etc.

During this time the churches were filled and there was much prayer and patriotism evidenced. The German people had come back to life again.

Krummacher passed high school cum laude, and when to the University of Halle. Krummacher and his friends made their way to the school feeling as though they stood head and shoulders above everyone else as they arrived in 1815. The school had 600 other students, many of whom wore badges of honor for their service in the war of liberation.

Krummacher was faced with the awful instruction of rationalism as taught by Niemeyer in veiled form and Wegscheider in open outspoken form. The only source of truth was Reason, and each statement in the Holy Scriptures had to be evaluated to determine if it was to be accepted or rejected. The result is that the Lord Jesus was stripped of all supernatural majesty, and reduced to a simple teacher who was entangled in the prejudices of the time. He never performed any miracles, and did not rise from the dead. Their venerated teacher Wegscheider interpreted the language of the Scriptures according to his own ideas, even though the words clearly taught the very opposite.

Another famed rationalist teacher that Krummacher had was the great Hebrew scholar Gesenius. Gesenius was just a young man at the time, but his unbelief was very pointed and evident. His rationalism was different than the respected and earnest Wegscheider. Gesenius was little, lively and petulant. He would make long Hebrew assignments mentioning with a scornful smile some doctrine or teaching. In Church history, the students were made to feel as if they were being conducted through a tour of an insane asylum, with his scornful wit causing the class to convulse in laughter. The Professor of Practical Theology was Marx. He always wore embroidered white gloves in the pulpit, and intoned the prayers in a manner adopted from the opera. He even brought in a celebrated stage player to entertain the students with her pantomimes, in order to help his students learn to become public speakers!

Thus, Krummacher bemoaned the thousands of theologians that went out from the school having a disdain and unbelief in the Word of God. There was one old preacher at the school whose lectures were always well attended, who could easily have squashed the rationalism, had he not been ill and weak in body, and afraid to speak out against his fellow teachers. He was held in high reverence as an old man of the bygone days of faith. Instead of boldly confronting the students, he prayed quietly each Easter for just one student to convert to the belief in the inspiration of God's Holy word, and his prayers were answered, causing him great joy. In 1817, Krummacher went to the University of Jena. Before leaving he preached his first sermon in a village church, and they declared his work "well done." His main reason for leaving Halle was to get away from the sometimes violent behavior of the students and the general depravity of the student body. He was happy to see the students disciplined in dress and action, going about singing or carrying on in cheerful conversation. He was warmly welcomed by a student, when he asked for directions, and given help in carrying his things and in personally conducting him to the dormitory. Krummacher was soon elected to a position of responsibility there. The School Hall was a glorious sight, with the decorated officers, and an enthusiastic student body of 800 young men who raised their loud clear voices in the school song. The professors scorned the modern rationalism, but were not wholly accepting of the accounts of Scripture, reserving the right to not accept whatever they chose not to believe.

Krummacher passed his University exams cum laude and applied to be a candidate preacher. He preached on the assigned passage of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes from Matthew 15:32-38. Krummacher preached on how it served as a symbol in which the goodness of God is mirrored toward all the needy and suffering children of men. His father, who presided over the Anhalt governing body, interrupted his discourse, demanding to know if he regarded the Gospel as historically true or as an allegory? The young Krummacher was suddenly stunned at the question, never having considered it in such a light. It took some time for him to gather his composure and answer that he did not deny the truth of the miracles, but that he viewed them as more importantly expressing the moral truths they represented. However, upon verbalizing the statement he realized his whole Christian life was some undefined sentiment, rather than firm conviction. He passed the theological examination with honor, although he was humiliated by it.

Almost immediately his father was asked if the young Krummacher would come fill a vacated post of assistant preacher of a German Reformed congregation in Frankfurt-on-the-Maine. He passed his trial discourse and was unanimously chosen by the congregation. He returned home again, this time to apply for a second examination to be a preacher, which he passed, returning to the old

town of Frankfurt to preach at the afternoon sermon, and to fill in when either of the two pastors were not able to do the morning services.

02.00.1. ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE by F. W. Krummacher, D. D.

Translated from the German

02.00.3. Copyright Information

Copyright Information Copyright © 1880

by

American Tract Society New York edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century ago

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

This book was originally published prior to 1923,

it is therefore in the public domain and free to be posted

in its entirety despite recent publication.

God bless you from the Baptist Bible Believers website!

Please tell everyone you know about this website, pray for this ministry - and that will be payment enough!

“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Proverbs 23:23)

02.00.4 Table of Contents

Table of Contents

01. Elijah’s First Appearance 02. Elijah at the Brook Cherith 03. The Departure for Zarephath 04. Raising the Widow’s Son at Zarephath 05. Elijah and Obadiah 1:06. Deliverance from the Mouth of a Lion 07. Elijah and the People at Mount Carmel 08. The Decision at Mount Carmel 09. The Prayer on Mount Carmel 10. Flight into the Wilderness 11. Visit under the Juniper Tree 12. Arrival at Mount Horeb 13. The Manifestation on Mount Horeb 14. Renewed Mission 15. The Hidden Church 16. The Calling of Elisha 17. Naboth’s Vineyard 18. Ahab’s Repentance 19. The Journey to Ekron 20. The Preaching by Fire 21. The Work-day Evening 22. The Passage Through Jordan 23. The Great Request 24. The Ascension

25. The Parting

26. The Legacy 27. Growth in Grace 28. The Writing Which Came to Jehoram from Elija 29. The Mount of Transfiguration 30. The Holy Embassy 31. The Shekinah 32. None but Jesus

***

02.01. Elijah's First Appearance

Elijah’s First Appearance

CHAPTER ONE

It is a brilliant description which the Lord gives us of his true church here on earth, when, in the Song of Solomon 4:4, he says, “Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.”

He compares it to that strong hold of the Jebusites, on the hill of Zion, which David took. Thus the church of God also stands founded on a rock, and that rock is Christ and his blood. It rests upon the power and word of God; the eternal triune Lord bears it in his hands, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The tower of David was builded for an armory. And when was ever the fortress of the church of Jesus Christ unprotected. For nearly six thousand years has the infernal adversary bent his bow against it, and shot at it with his fiery darts; but it stands indestructible to this day. For there is one shield over it, which is better than a thousand: where is the lance that will penetrate it?

That shield is He who is the Alpha and the Omega, and his protection who can disannul?

But David’s tower was hung with weapons of mighty men of valor.

- Here, the sword of the preacher of righteousness;

- There, of Moses the meek and much tried man:

- Here, the armor of Daniel;

- There, of Paul, who fought the good fight

- Peter, divinely surnamed a rock;

- Here, helmets, breastplates, and other equipments of Reformers, a Huss and a Wickliff, a Luther, a Calvin, and a Zuinglius.

All of these zealous for the truth for the honor of God and all valiant defenders of citadel of Zion.

And behold! amongst the swords of these spiritual heroes, one which presents itself with peculiar effulgence to the eye, one which has wrought mightily for the glory of the kingdom of God, and was sharp and piercing as any could be in arduous and evil times. Who once handled that noble weapon!

It was ELIJAH THE TISHBITE; a man mighty word, and deed, and in miracles besides; who broke forth like a fire, and whose word burnt like a torch, and who was so eminently distinguished by Divine grace, that, when the Lord of glory himself appeared upon earth, the Jews said, “It is Elias!”

The life of Elijah may be made an abundant subject of animation and encouragement, of strength and refreshment to our faith; we intend therefore to set forth the history of this man of God in a series of discourses. We shall accompany him at one time into the streets of the royal city, and to the prince's throne; at another, into the solitary wilderness; upon the public and tempestuous scene of his labors, and into the quiet chamber and to the humble couch watered with his tears; and learn of him how the Lord guides his people, and how his imparted strength is perfected in weakness.

May the Spirit of the Lord God bless and seal these, our meditations, imparting to them such a life and power, that many a weary heart may be refreshed, and that the feeble knees of many may be strengthened!

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1).

Thus commences the brief record of the prophet Elijah, abruptly setting us at once in the midst of his life.

At this very first mention of him we see the whole man, living and moving, in spirit and in conduct. This manner of his introduction to our notice is itself remarkable.

In the preceding chapters the inspired historian had, as it were, dug through the wall, and discovered to us the horrible abominations in which Israel, during those melancholy times, was so deeply immersed.

- Clouds and thick darkness covered the whole land;

- The images of Baalim and Ashtaroth fearfully gleam everywhere;

- Idolatrous temples and heathen altars occupy the sacred soil;

- Every hill smokes with their sacrifices, every vale resounds with the blasphemous yells of cruel priestcraft.

- The people drink in iniquity like water, and sport in shameless rites around their idols.

Alas! alas! How is the glory of Israel departed! How is Abraham's seed no longer discernible! Their light is become darkness, the salt has lost its savor; the fine gold has become dim! And now, while darkness reigns, a darkness which can be felt, while no cheering star gleams through the universal blackness, on a sudden the history changes, with the words, "AND ELIJAH SAID." -The man seems as if drop from heaven into the midst of this awful night-piece without father, without mother, without descent, as is written of Melchizedec. Lo, he stands forth in the midst of the desolation, but not without his God.

Almost the only grain of salt in the general corruption, the only leaven that is to leaven the whole mass; and that we may learn at once who he is, he commences his career with an unheard of act of faith, by closing, in the name of his Lord, the heavens over Israel, and changing the firmament into iron and brass. Thanks be to God! The night is no longer so horrible, for a man of God now appears, like the rising moon, in the midst of it.

Let us meditate for a few moments on what is here related of Elijah:

I. His name and circumstances.

II. His spiritual character.

III. The prophetic denunciation with which he comes forward into notice.

I. His name is Elijah

It is no useless particularity to attach importance to the names of sacred personages, and to inquire into their meaning!

The names of Scripture characters were often given by God himself. Such names served to convey a Divine promise or assurance, or taught some rule of life, or carried some Divine memorial, or indicated the character and predominant disposition of the persons who received them, or expressed some Divine calling. Thus the name of Noah signified a comforter; the name of Abraham, a father of many nations. Names were to the people like memoranda, and like the bells on the garments of the priests, reminding them of the Lord and his government, and furnishing matter for a variety of salutary reflections. To the receivers of them they ministered consolation and strength, warning and encouragement; and to others they served to attract the attention and heart to God.

I am aware, that to make things of this kind the subject of any religious consideration at present, is to expose ourselves to the imputation of weakness and superstition. How few there are, even of professed Christians, who practically believe that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, that God's providence extends to matters the most minute, and that he is often specially glorified in the "day of small things!"

But he who possesses this childlike faith, accounting nothing as really little in God's sight, realizing his heavenly Father's gracious presence in his house and garden, under his vine and his fig-tree-blessed indeed is that man; he possesses much joy and peace, and Divine delight at all times; wherever he is, he beholds the traces and hears the voice of God.

The name of this wondrous man was ELIJAH- that is, being interpreted, "My God of power," or, "the Lord is my strength." A great and excellent name and he bore it in deed and in truth. He was a man like thee or me; nothing in himself, but the strength of God was his; he could do nothing, and yet deeds of omnipotence proceeded from his hands; he lay in the dust, a worm, but was commissioned with Divine authority and power; he was a royal personage, who had power to open and shut heaven, to bid the dead to live, the living to die, and to hold judgment upon the enemies of God. Thus he might justly be called "Elijah." And is the force of this name merely, "God strengthens me?" Certainly not; but rather, "God himself is my strength."

Here is a distinction with a difference. It is not the same thing to say, "God holds his shield before me;" and to say, "God himself is my shield." If he holds his shield before me, not a hair of my head can be touched and the evil I dread shall not come nigh me. If God himself be my shield, I then lift up my head in the raging storm, as under a serene sky, and am a partaker of the happiness of God as much in the midst of tribulation as out of it.

Peter, when released from prison, when his chains fell from his hands, and the prison doors opened to him of their own accord, might shout for joy as he went on, and say, “The shield of the Lord is around me.” But Stephen, when stoned to death by his enemies might cry out, with the countenance of an angel “God is my shield!”

If “God strengthens me,” then, through his grace, I experience within me a Divine power by which I can accomplish something, and feel myself arrayed and armed with a courageous and joyful spirit; I smile at partition walls that would confine me, and at barricades that would exclude me, and I fear nothing. But if, finding nothing but weakness in my soul, and trembling at the sight of the danger that surrounds me, and at the immense mountains of difficulties which lie before me;-yet, with all the shrinking of nature, I advance with holy boldness to meet them, hoping against reason and feeling, in simple faith on Him who is eternally near, who will go with me, and to whom it is an easy thing to rebuke, with a word, the ocean’s waves, and to thresh the mountains so that they shall become a plain; and if I walk by faith on the waves of nature’s terrors, destitute of courage and yet a hero, out of weakness made strong, and out of despondency valiant-then I can exult and say, “God is my strength;” and my feet are placed upon a rock.

What a wonderful thing is faith, which lays hold of a power to do all things through Christ strengthening us; which brings man, who is a worm, into fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; and is the means whereby strength is ordained, and praise is perfected out of the mouth of babes and sucklings!

Elijah owed not his greatness to high birth or station, or a native place of renown. He was born, as we see from the text, among the mountains of Gilead, on the other side Jordan; a region which, though famous for its plants, and its balms and spices, was mostly inhabited by blind idolaters, and overspread with the abominations of the Amorites. It lay not far from the country of the Gergesenes, where, in the time of our Lord, the devils entered into the swine; and it may be supposed that, unless from extreme necessity, no Israelite would take up his dwelling among these mountains.

It was probably in some poor abode, possibly in a wretched banished Jewish family, that Elijah was born and brought up. His birthplace, Tishbe, may he considered as only a mean and obscure village in the mountains; and the prophet in his childhood could not have known much of schools, or seats of learning, or of the great world. But it has constantly been the way of our God in all ages to take those, by whom he purposes to do things, rather out of the dust than from off the throne that all may see how everything depends upon his choice, and know that flesh and blood have not wrought his mighty works, but that to him alone belongs the glory.

Hence it was that he thus prepared in Gilead the balm which should recover the health of the daughter of Zion; and in that den of murderers, the country of the Amorites, he raised up the man, by whose instrumentality he purposed to beat down altars, execute judgment upon kings, and destroy the priests of Baal.

If we translate the word “Tishbite,” it means a CONVERTER; and how well does this name befit the whole life and vocation of our prophet!

Elijah enters on the stage of history with a word of faith and power:-“And Elijah the Tishbite said;” -and where was it he spake, and to whom and when? Here surely is “the voice of one crying in the

wilderness.”

Ever since the death of Solomon the evil of idolatry had been coming in like a flood, and no barrier could any longer avail to keep out the torrent of general corruption. The despotic declaration of Rehoboam, the bson of Solomon, upon coming to the throne, that if his father had scourged the people with whips, he would chastise them with scorpions, had occasioned such a disaffection, that the ten tribes had revolted, and formed a separate kingdom under Jeroboam. Only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained, subject to the house of David, and formed the kingdom of Judah; while the ten rebellious tribes styled themselves the kingdom of Israel.

The kings of Judah, who possessed the south of the promised land, resided at Jerusalem, on Mount Zion. The kingdom of Israel comprised all the northern districts, and its royal residence was first the fortified hill of Thirza, and afterwards the city of Samaria. The two kingdoms were at almost perpetual war with each other; but this was not the greatest evil. A thousand times worse was their internal disorder.

Jeroboam began his reign by introducing, from political motives, a new idolatry. He was apprehensive that, if the people continued in connection with the temple and the worship of God at Jerusalem, they would gradually fall away from him again, and return under the dominion of the house of David. He therefore made an imitation of the golden cherubim of the temple, transferred some of the festivals to other seasons, and chose priests out of all the tribes of the people, at his own pleasure, without restriction to the tribe of Levi.

This unlawful worship became open idolatry, when, in the year 900 before the birth of Christ, king Ahab, that tame obsequious slave of his bloodthirsty wife Jezebel, ascended the throne of Israel. Then it was, at the instigation of this ungodly woman of Sidon, that the worship of Baal became the established religion of the country, and the worshipers of the true God were persecuted with fire and sword.

O! The sad and evil times which now came on! The gross darkness which now covered the land; the horrible abominations which now went on accumulating! Gloomy idol temples rose in every direction; profane altars, stained with the blood of prophets and other holy men, bade defiance to the Most High, and called for Divine jealousy and vengeance. It seemed as if Satan had transferred his residence from hell to earth, and striving to obscure the light of heaven with the smoke and vapor of the most horrible idolatry.

Such were the times, such the awful state of things, when Elijah, the man of God, stood up. The kingdom of Ahab and Jezebel is the dark field of labor on which he enters, in the name of God, and where we are to behold him employed.

- How will he conduct himself in the midst of such a crooked and perverse generation?

- How will he navigate this stormy sea?

- How will he surmount walls and barriers like these?

Such questions will be fully answered as we proceed, and by every answer I trust we shall be strengthened in the faith, and constrained joyfully to exclaim, “The Lord, he God! the Lord, he is God!”

II. Let us now take a view of Elijah's spiritual character,

the relation in which he stood toward God This he indicates himself in the text, where he exclaims, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand." Elijah stood before the God of Israel: such was his spiritual position and situation; such the characteristic state of his inward life.

Is it asked: Who is the God of Israel?

Who then was the angel that conversed with Abraham in the plain of Mamre, and the mysterious person in the form of man, who wrestled with Jacob till daybreak, and said to him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and has prevailed" (Genesis 32:28).

What was that appearance in the burning bush at the foot of Horeb, and that bright and wondrous Presence, of which God the Father said unto Moses in the desert, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exodus 33:14).

Who was that living Rock which followed the people of Israel through the wilderness in their journey to Canaan; or that Captain of the Lord's host who appeared, with a drawn sword in his hand, unto Joshua, and who was himself the sword of Joshua's victories and the shield of his help? Joshua 5:13-15.

Dost thou know him well? MESSIAH is his name! He is the Lord, the God of Israel! Before him stand the thousands of thousands; before him, the angels whom he makes as the winds, and his ministers whom he makes as the flames of fire, before him stood Elijah.

"Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee!" so spake the queen of Sheba to Solomon. 1 Kings 10:8. But a greater than Solomon is here! And how much happier are those servants who stand always in the presence of the God of Israel! But no one can ever stand before him in his own strength. Those whom he suffers to appear before him, stand on the foundation of the Lord; stand in his righteousness and beauty.

For with an iron Sceptre he casts down all who dare present themselves before him in their own footing, or behold him in their own strength. Or lift up the head before him in their own righteousness; this he can never endure. But to the worm in the dust, to the Poor self-renouncing penitent, lying in his blood, he says, "Lift thyself up, stand before me, behold my face with comfort, and be not afraid!"

He that desires to lift up the head in his presence, must have drunk of the brook in the way, must have lain prostrate before him in the dust, must have abased and humbled himself.

How often may Elijah have fallen on his face before him among the mountains of Gilead, how many tears may he have shed in solitary caves and caverns, before he could say, "As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, before whom I stand!"

Elijah was a man reconciled to God in Christ Jesus, the promised Messiah, and clothed with his righteousness. This is implied his words, "I stand before the Lord God of Israel;" and is further evident from his having received the honor, a thousand years afterwards, to be a witness with Moses, on Mount Tabor, of the transfiguration of his Lord.

But standing before the Lord, expresses something more than a state of reconciliation in general. I stand before the Lord, when I desire above all things that the will of the Lard may be at all times plainly manifested to me, and that I may do nothing, from one moment to another, but what shall please him and promote his glory; when I keep my eyes waking, and place myself as it were at my post, to watch for the tokens of my King, and listen attentively with my spirit to his voice, and his commands within me and without; when I desire, according to the least of his intimations, to run the way of his commandments-I then stand before the Lord.

Thus Elijah stood before the Lord. To be an instrument for the accomplishment of the divine will, and for the glorifying of his name, was his ardent desire; he could say with Isaiah's watchman, "Lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the day-time, and I am set in my ward whole nights" (Isaiah 21:8). His life was a hearkening to God's voice; he passed his days in the presence of his eternal King, and "Lord, speak! for thy servant heareth," was his watchword.

Such was Elijah, by the grace of God, and thus did he stand before the Lord God of Israel.

III. We shall consider the denunciation Elijah proclaimed

Let us direct our eyes to Samaria, that idolatrous city. There stands the man of God in the midst of foes, before the tyrant Ahab, and opens his mouth boldly and valiantly, and exclaims in such a manner as to make the people's ears tingle, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

Elijah-What art thou doing? What a risk thou art incurring! Is not this putting the honor of the Lord at stake? Will they not ridicule not only thee, but him also, if there be any delay in what thou hast announced? Yes; but Elijah is not afraid of this. He knows that the word of the Lord in his mouth is truth.

But how was it that Elijah was empowered to make such an announcement? The prophet, full of holy jealousy for the honor of his God, felt an inward assurance that such a chastisement upon the land would tend to melt the hardened hearts of the people, and to restore the glory of the Lord's name He brought this matter before the Lord, as James tells us at the end of his epistle, James 5:17.

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain?"

And Amen! was the answer from above in his soul. Amen, be it so! It is given into thy hands to shut and to open heaven. Elijah took this Amen of the living God as a sword in his hand: depending upon this Amen, he prophesied drought with Divine infallibility.

The whole country of Samaria seemed to shake her head at it, and to laugh at his prediction. The luxuriant pastures and the well-water; fields seemed to exclaim together, "This judgment shall not be executed!"-and a thousand springs and brooks, flowing through the land, and the vapory hills, which form and attract the clouds, all seemed to join together to falsify his word. But Elijah was not confounded; with the Amen of his God in the hand of his faith, what were natural appearances or reasonings to him!

His voice was more mighty than that of many waters, for it was the voice of God within him; neither springs, nor brooks, nor clouds, nor the richest luxuriance of vegetation could aught avail against that word, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, over this land shall come a drought.”

So, sincere Christian, do thou also believe the Amen which thou hast received from God in thy heart respecting his adoption of thee, and his grace toward thee!

Suffer not thyself to be confounded either by thy objecting nature, or by the weakness of the flesh; either by the scruples of reason, or by the devil, the spirit that always gainsayeth. Keep a firm hold, by faith, of the Divine Amen once given thee, and abide by it, and say, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, and endureth forever, nothing shall condemn me, or separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

“As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word!”

Elijah said it, and immediately heaven and earth changed their appearance. The one became as iron, and the other as brass, and the dew of heaven was restrained. The word of the prophet struck, like a fever, into the heart of the earth, withering and scorching; and all that was fresh and green faded and hung its head; every stream and rivulet dried up, and all that had breath lay gasping and languishing on the ground.

Neither dew, nor rain, fell during three years and six months. Such were the effects produced by the voice of man-but a man who was in communion and accord with the Almighty.

In conclusion, I say unto you, my people, whom the Lord hath so highly favored; verily, if the high places in your hearts are not removed, the idolatry rooted out, the Baalim demolished, before Whom, alas, so many of you, secretly or more openly, bow the knee, it will be more tolerable for the land of Samaria and Israel than for you.

O it is already as if heaven had begun to close upon us. How sparingly does the dew of the Spirit fall! how few arise from the dead; and how long is it since a plenteous shower of heavenly rain has refreshed our vale! *

* The Valley of Barmen, where the author resides.

My friends, what is the cause of this? Has an Elijah stood forth in the midst of us with his word, “As the Lord liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain these years?” Or does Elijah sleep, forgetting to re-open what was shut up?

Church of God, thou little flock of Israel, thou people of his possession, thou art as Elijah. Yes, thy voice can call forth clouds and rain. Arise, and call upon thy God! for “the effectual fervent prayer righteous man availeth much!” (James 5:16)

Pray for dew and rain upon the dry land, and to announce it from the “Amen” of thy heart, say, The drought will soon be at an end; get thee up, eat and drink, and be joyful, for there is a sound of abundance of rain. May God graciously give it! Amen.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

02.02. Elijah At The Brook Cherith

Elijah At The Brook Cherith

CHAPTER TWO At that awful moment, when Israel stood at the brink of the Red Sea, perplexed which way to turn; while before them the deep waters roared behind them the enraged Egyptians were rushing upon them with chariots and horsemen, and on either side of them perpendicular rocks rising up like walls on high, making retreat impossible-the Lord came to Moses and said, “Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward” (Exodus 14:15).

There seems something very surprising in this command. But we have a God, my friends, who always knows exactly, and much better than we do, what is good and necessary for his children; and, in truth he never leads them otherwise than they would wish him to lead them, if they were able to see as clearly into their hearts and necessities as he does. But we very seldom know what is good for us; and therefore the ways by which God leads us are generally mysterious and obscure, just because the why and the wherefore are concealed from us.

“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward!” What a commission was this!

- Lord, behold the sea with its billows at our feet! “Let them go forward!”

- Lord, are we able to walk upon the waves, and to find a highway upon the mighty waters “Let them go forward!”

Lord, Lord! but where is the passage over the flood, or,1 where are the vessels for our conveyance? Is it thy will that thy people perish in the sea, and that the Egyptians triumph “Speak unto them, that they go forward!” saith the Almighty; but still he does not touch a single wave to quell it, nor does he dry up the sea, but let its waves roar at their pleasure; and yet he points to its troubled surface and commands that “all the hosts of Israel go forward!”

They must venture upon his word, they must believe before they see, and go forward in faith. They venture, and lo! The very moment they prepare to advance in the name of their God, and to step upon the boisterous element-the waves, struck with the rod of Moses, part asunder, and become a wall on their right hand and on their left, a highway in the sea is opened before them, and the people pass over joyfully.

This is the way of our gracious God.

We must venture upon his Word; and verily, however much we seem to hazard in his name, nothing is really hazarded. And when he commands us to go forward, be it into fire, tempest, or the sea, let us only advance in the path of duty, and the result will be glorious. Truths like these, of the most consolatory kind, we shall see confirmed as we now proceed with the history of our prophet.

“And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the

brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook" (1 Kings 17:2-6).

How refreshing a stream of instruction may this narrative prove to those who have to tread in any similar path, or to bear any similar trials to those of Elijah! Draw near then, ye that seem to dwell in a desert, and who are solitary in the midst of this wilderness world. Bring vessels with you and draw abundantly, and drink, and let your sorrows cease.

The subjects to which we would now direct your attention, are,

I. Elijah's perplexity;

II. God's command;

III. The prophet's faith;

IV. The triumph of his faith.

I. Elijah had prayed In zeal for the honor of God he had prayed that it might not rain; and, being assured of an answer to his prayer, had gone to Samaria, to meet Ahab. There, in his presence he declared with holy boldness-and no doubt the whole country was soon filled with the report of it-"There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word," 1 Kings 17:1. The word was spoken in God's name, and the judgment denounced immediately followed: first, in appalling harbingers; then, in complete desolation.

The sun glared upon the earth with its scorching beams, a memento of the eyes of the Lord, the righteous Judge, which are described as "a flame of fire;" those rays which heretofore had diffused a smile over the whole face of nature were now changed into arrows of destruction and death; while the sultry winds dried up with their burning gusts every rivulet from its bed, and every fountain from its source; the plants and trees dropped their leaves and withered away; the lowing herds and bleating flocks explored every spot upon the parched fields; the wild beasts moaned in the forests; the dearth rose to its height, and it was not long before the famine became universal, and turned every habitation into a place of mourning and woe.

And where is Elijah? Where should he be? He is sharing in the common calamity.

No angel has come to convey him away-no chariot of fire has taken him up. There he stands with the criminals on the place of execution, apparently himself a sacrifice to the wrath he had drawn down, and exposed, with the ungodly, to famine and death. There he stands, panting and groaning like the rest, exposed to the same dangers, and, over and above, execrated by a whole nation, and devoted to ruin by the infuriated populace. He seemed likely to fuller the fate of Samson, who pulled down upon himself the pillars of Dagon's temple roof, and was buried in the common ruin of his enemies.

Surely it was no small matter, in such circumstances, to keep faith alive. What a commotion must have arisen in his soul at beholding the universal misery around him and his own personal danger! How easily may we suppose natural pity at one time, and natural fear and despondency at another

suggesting to him, “Why didst thou pray for this?”

It is not difficult to realize the perplexity in which the prophet must have felt himself. His joyful elevation of spirit must well nigh have subsided, and no support was left him but simple faith in the “Amen” of his God; the consciousness that all had been done in God’s name, and that now the Lord would provide.

Similar experiences to that of which Elijah was probably the subject are not uncommon to the children of God. Something like this every Christian occasionally undergoes, in one way or another. An individual is inwardly constrained to say or do some particular thing. The impulse is strong- the inward call seems not to be resisted. Stimulated by holy zeal, he cheerfully enters, in the name of God, upon a duty or a course of action, without any cold calculation of consequences- the measure is adopted, the word is uttered. Then all at once he is made aware of what he has risked; he finds himself cast into difficulties and dangers, which seem far to exceed the measure of his faith and ability; he has stepped with Peter upon the open sea; the wind becomes boisterous, and he is threatened with destruction. He would fain retrace his steps, but retreat is out of the question.

Then that cheerful zeal which actuated us seems to have burnt down into the socket, and the soul desponds and cries, “Lord! save us, we perish!”

This was the case with some excellent men, who very lately, on account of their faith, were obliged to leave their native land. In opposition to the spirit of the great and mighty of this world, and of the ignorant multitude, they preached to their congregations the pure Gospel-repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

In so doing they had exposed themselves to danger, which however was somewhat held back by their prudently refraining from publicly attacking the national church, and the unchristian inroads which their superiors were making upon its ancient doctrine and discipline.

But, all unexpectedly, their lips were opened by another, so that they could not refrain from preaching what they had been reluctant to bring out, and would otherwise have shrunk from doing; and, carried away by a holy zeal; they declared the danger by which the national church was menaced.

All mischiefs and abuses were then exposed without fear of consequences, so that the people’s ears tingled. They could no longer keep silence respecting the insidious design of reducing the religion of Christ ultimately to mere heathenism; they roundly declared nothing else was intended than craftily to bear away the ark of the covenant, and to smuggle images of jealousy-false doctrines and precepts- into the sanctuary.

They complained openly that the churches had been robbed of the invaluable standards of their faith; that books were imposed upon teachers and scholars, which were infected with the spirit of Antichrist; that the last pillars of their ancient ecclesiastical constitution were shaken, in order that the church of Christ might become a mere political institution; and many of the worthy preachers so lost sight of themselves, and gave themselves up so entirely to the impulse of the Spirit of God, that they openly avowed that they could net conscientiously belong to such a church any longer.

The words were uttered, the match thrown in the mine; and who would fetch it back. The people were amazed and confounded; many hastened to their teachers as soon as the sermon was ended, and expressed their determination to separate from such a church; others wavered, and were much perplexed. The mass of the people vented abuse and curses, threatening to stone these intrepid witnesses; and the strong arm of civil power came upon them with ejectments, imprisonment and exile.

The worthy men had not thought of consequences like these.

Consternation came upon them like an armed man. The heroic zeal, which had carried them away in their pulpits, and in which they regarded God only and his cause, but not themselves or their own lives, had now so subsided under the pressure of these floods of affliction, that they were forced to say, “Had we foreseen the consequences, we would fain have held our peace.”

Nothing now remained to them but the conviction that God had directed them; for their own prudence would have had it otherwise; and this assurance that God would have it so, is the pilgrim-staff which has supported and comforted them in their banishment and wanderings to the present hour.

Now, that which happened to these worthy men upon a public scale, happens to thousands of Christians in a more private way continually. One, under the influence of the Spirit of love, commits unsuspectingly his whole property to a brother in embarrassment, in the name of a disciple; but subsequently, in his own family, he experiences the temporal inconveniences of such an act, in his own privations or those of his children, and in other perplexing circumstances; then his joy departs, and his heart is terrified.

Another, animated by holy zeal, stands up at length among his friends or relatives, with a confession of Christ crucified, or even with a serious call to repentance; but afterwards, when he finds what misunderstandings and wrong feelings he has thus raised against himself, his zeal subsides, and he is wretchedly cast down. What now must he do? Must he recall what he has uttered? This he cannot, this he dare not do, for his Lord’s sake; no, he must let the fire burn.

A third is constrained, from the fullness of his heart, to entreat the Lord to unite him more closely to himself; and if it cannot be done by gentle means, to effectuate it through affliction-the affliction comes-the waves of trouble roll over him; hut alas! Affliction, while he is under its chastening, no longer seemeth joyous, but grievous. The cheerful emotion, with which he once prayed respecting it, is gone; he is ready to repent of such a prayer; his heart can do nothing but mourn and complain.

Are we then to begin nothing without first calculating the consequences? I reply, Where it is possible previously to sit down and count the cost. Do so. But, as this is not always possible, it cannot be made a general rule.

- The lion roars-who can forbear to tremble?

- The Lord gives the word-who can forbear to publish it?

- The stream rushes along-who shall impede it?

- The love of Christ constrains-who shall restrain it?

- The Spirit is a fire in the bosom-who shall quench it?

What a man is bound to do, he must do; and if any evil resort from it, he may then say, “I was bound to do it; it was God’s command; it was not the dictate of flesh and blood:” and, with faith like this, much difficulty and perplexity may be overcome. And you may rely upon this, that if the arm of God is ready to assist any, it is those, who, upon his call, “ Come hither!” confer not with flesh and blood, but with joyful alacrity venture upon the waves, and at his bidding risk all consequences.

This we may learn from the example of Elijah.

II. He did not long remain in this solitary condition,

left to the musings of his heavy heart When he knew not what to do, counsel was given him; and when he saw no way of escape, the gates were opened to him. Such is usually the case. We read that now “The word of the Lord came to him.”

What a cheering visitation in a land overspread with desolation and misery! For when the word of the Lord comes to us, we are visited by nothing less than God’s eternal love and compassion; for the word of the Lord is Christ.

Nothing is so beautifying to the spirit of a man, as the visitation and manifestation of Christ. But this is especially blissful and desirable when we have undertaken something in his name, and have thereby kindled a fire which threatens to consume ourselves and others-when, at his bidding, we have ventured upon a duty, the consequences of which are such as to perplex us, and make us doubt whether it was really the will of God, and at his bidding.

Such a perplexity is indescribably painful, and raises our distress to the highest pitch.

How gladly is He welcomed under such circumstances, when he unexpectedly knocks at our door and permits us again to hear his pleasant voice; when he again, in some way of his own, gives us to understand that we have acted rightly; causing something to transpire which leaves us no longer in doubt as to his approval of our conduct; and either by some external help, or by some spiritual testimony and assurance of his grace, giving us an evidence that he regards us not with displeasure, but with complacency; and that what we have done has been well done, for he has pronounced it good.

Oh! This surpasses all other joy in this world, and though our temporal burdens may remain as they were, we are wonderfully strengthened to bear them!

“The word of the Lord came to Elijah.” He had not to seek for it, but it came to him; and the Lord is kind, indeed, thus to comfort his children uninvited, and to anticipate their suit with his own counsel; for he does not always wait until they ask, any more than that saying is always true, that “Distress will compel men to pray.”

O how are men even at their wit’s end, when the waves of trouble come suddenly upon them, and imminent dangers encompass them. They are confounded at the winds; they shrink at the waves; they seize the rudder of human strength; they cling to the brittle anchor of human hope; but, “Master, awake, we perish!” is forgotten; or, if the Lord is thought of, there is a want of faith, or filial

courage and confidence, or something else; and scarcely one step is taken towards seeking the Lord. How justly might he be offended at this, and requite us accordingly!

But, no! He rather prevents his children with the blessings of goodness, and heaps coals of fire on their heads. He often visits them uninvited and breaks in with his light and salvation, where he was not only not sought after, but even affronted with misgivings. Such visits of the Lord are surely well suited to humble and abase us, to melt the heart and stop the mouth, so that we have not a word to say for shame and confusion of face. Free and unmerited grace then appears in all its brightness; the Christian can find nothing in himself worthy to be thought on as a meritorious cause of the afforded aid-no prayer, no sigh, no looking up to the Lord; he cannot lift up so much as his eyes to look him in the face; he can only kiss his feet; and this humbling acknowledgment of mere unmerited grace, which our proud nature is so unwilling to make, how salutary is it-how good-how much for our spiritual welfare!

Hence the Lord sometimes purposely takes away from his children all that they have, withholding from them even the spirit of prayer itself; and then he helps and answers them, as if the best and most fervent prayer had been offered up to him, that they may become truly and thoroughly humbled, and convinced that in every respect “it is not of him that willeth, not of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Romans 9:16).

But to return to the narrative. The Lord interposed, not only to comfort the prophet, but to rescue him from extreme danger. This, however, was to be done in a way which should glorify the name of the Lord, as well as serve for a beneficial exercise of faith to Elijah. No fiery chariot was yet to bear him above his troubles; he was not yet to rise aloft amidst a convoy of angels. Here would have been little room for the exercise of faith.

God, therefore, showed him another path.

“Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.”

A singular direction-as it would seem from a bad condition to a worse. But you remember it was said to Manoah, “Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is wonderful!” (Judges 13:18) And as is his name, so is his way. “Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the deep waters, and thy footsteps are not known!” (Psalms 77:19)

Do we inquire whether the Lord directs his children still, as thus in old time Undoubtedly he does, though not by any audible voice, yet with equal certainty and evidence; and this commonly by closing up, inwardly or outwardly, all other ways, and leaving only one open to us. And is not this equivalent to our hearing a voice behind us saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it, when we turn to the right hand, and when we turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

When he inwardly leads us-he impresses a scriptural conviction on the judgment as to what we ought to do, and it is scarcely possible for us any longer to hesitate. Would our feelings lead us in a different course? Then peace immediately departs, and such disquietude arises within us, that we are compelled to retrace our steps.

When he outwardly leads us-he brings us into such circumstances, connections, and situations, that only one way remains open, for we see every other obstructed by visible providences. The ways which the Lord thus points out to us seem, therefore, like that to the brook Cherith, selected and appointed purely for the exercise of our faith, the crucifixion of our old man, the mortification of our inveterate corruptions. Only then follow on courageously!

Whenever the Lord says to any of his children, “Get thee hence, and hide thyself,” he also adds, either expressly or by implication, “and the ravens shall feed thee there.” Every duty which He commands has its promise appended to it; and we need be under no concern except to know that the Lord has directed our way.

III. And how did Elijah obey this command his God?

There was doubtless in him, as well in every other man, something that would oppose this divine direction, and be dissatisfied with it. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and therefore his nature would have much to so against it. How could it please him, that, instead of an instantaneous and supernatural deliverance, he is obliged to make a long journey on foot, like any ordinary person? And why he should be directed to turn eastward into the land of Judea, which participated in the judgments of Samaria, he could not discover. To be directed into the lonely wilderness, and to the brook Cherith, amidst gloomy, uninhabited woodlands, was far from inviting. And even his security there, from the pursuit of Ahab and from the general drought, was not warranted by any natural appearances: while the prospect of being fed by ravens, those unclean and voracious creatures, must have appeared as disagreeable as it was contrary to reason and experience.

But, however much nature might oppose, or the old man murmur and recoil, these were silenced and crucified within him. For there was a spirit imparted to Elijah which taught him that his own nature was wrong, and that Good’s will was right.

Not, perhaps, that Elijah was able, with fervency of joy, to thank God for the command given him, and triumphantly to rejoice in it. Possibly, his mind was much tried and depressed by it; but it proved courageous in the faith by which he endured, as seeing Him that is invisible.

“As it is the Divine command,” he might think, “therefore it is holy, just, and good. God’s commissions to his children, what are they but hidden promises? Since he saith to me, ‘Get thee hence,’ I am well assured that he will make a way for me, succor me, and preserve me on the way; for he can neither deceive nor be deceived. No serpent shall bite me, no wild beast devour me; for I am in God’s way. Since he commands me to turn eastward, I am certain, though I seem to be going towards the setting rather than the rising sun, still it will be morning over my head. Forasmuch as he bids me hide myself by the brook Cherith, which is before Jordan, that brook must be a safe place of refuge, though it were in the midst of Samaria itself. I am directed to drink of the brook; here then I have a pledge that the sun will not be permitted to affect this brook with his scorching rays.”

Thus might the prophet think, and then he would conclude further, that “God’s promises are, virtually, obligations which he imposes upon himself. If he say, ‘I will do this or that for thee,’ he must necessarily bring it to pass for his own name’ sake. Therefore the ravens will certainly come, and sooner will they themselves die of hunger, than I shall be suffered to starve.”

In this manner might Elijah have conversed with his own heart; and so, taking the word of the Lord into the hand of his faith, he made it the staff of his pilgrimage. Whenever he grew weary, he leaned upon this staff: his courage revived. When danger appeared his way, he feared not while he had this staff support him.

And have you such a staff in your hands, dear brethren? Are you assured, with this prophet, that the path you tread has been pointed out to you of God; and has any Divine promise been applied to you and become your own, either a particular promise, or a general one, like this; “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee” (Isaiah 43:1-2).

O then, of a truth, all is well, sure, and certain! But now look at Elijah as he takes his journey, a solitary traveler. It seems almost as if we heard the sound of his footsteps, while we read that “he went and did according to the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.”

IV. Come, let us pay a visit to this man of God in his new dwelling-place A dreary wild, near the banks of the Jordan, is the scene now opened before us. Dead silence reigns around, interrupted perhaps by the cry of the solitary bittern, while amongst the heath and the juniper bushes broods the ostrich-no hunter disturbing its repose.

No pathway opens to the view-not a human footstep is seen-all is wilderness and solitude. Let us follow him, in imagination, towards the Jordan, bonder lies our track, where the naked rocks rear their lofty heads and the forests frown. Then; through one thicket and another, through one narrow pass and another, we come at length down into a deep and narrow glen overhung with tangled wood, where a brook runs murmuring along and finds its way between the rocky masses.

O look! There sits the man of God! Here is his appointed dwelling: the blue sky his roof, the bare rocks his walls, the stone his seat, the shady wood his bed-chamber, the grass his couch; his company, the purling brook, and the hoarse ravens aloft among the trees. There he sits in his hairy mantle, silent and reflecting; and whenever solitude becomes wearisome, or the hissing of serpents or the distant roar of the lion would inject terror into his soul, he remembers, “I am imprisoned here for the Lord’s sake, and his footsteps are among these rocks;” and thus by faith and hope he regains courage.

For twelve months did Elijah dwell here. This may seem to you incredible, and almost dreadful! But how would you be astonished, were Elijah to assure you that the whole time never appeared tedious; that solitude daily became to him less solitary-nay lively and cheerful! And doubtless this was the case.

He needed neither books nor society-neither labor nor diversion to entertain him.

Silent nature around him was a sufficient book, and the treasure of his experience supplied him with an ample volume. Self-examination, prayer, and converse with Him who seeth in secret was employment enough for him. His Lord and God, whose gentlest whispers and footsteps he could far more readily perceive in this solitude than amidst the noise of the busy world, was sufficient company for him.

- The works of creation which encompassed him, soon served as a living epistle, which he found it employment enough to study.

- The rock by which he dwelt preached to him of a Rock that ever liveth, and whereon himself had built.

- The brook had something to say to him, and spoke many sweet and comfortable things to him of the truth and faithfulness of God, and told of other waters that were still to come-of waters that God would pour upon the dry ground, and of floods upon the thirsty land, and of springs which he would cause to break forth in the desert.

- At one time the shady trees would preach to him and suggest to him the comforts of the tree of life and of those heavenly palms from whose tops eternal peace would at length breathe upon him.

- At another, the cheerful songsters of the air, and the wild roses in the brakes would sing to him, “Be calm, Elijah, and free from care. How can He who is so faithfully mindful of us in this wilderness, feeding the one and giving fragrance and beauty to the other, be forgetful of thee?

In short, everything began to live, and breathe, and talk around him-the stars in the firmament, the flowers in the meadow, the drops on the leaves, and the zephyrs among the shrubs; so that Elijah experienced what the apostle says,

“There are so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification” (1 Corinthians 14:10); and was able to sing with David, “The voice of the Lord is powerful, The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness” (Psalms 29:4; Psalms 29:8).

After having thus pleased and delighted himself awhile in the exterior world and its speaking emblems, he would then return to another world within him, and be absorbed in listening to what was stirring and passing there.

At one time a new insight was afforded him into his deep poverty of spirit and natural corruption; and then he would be led to weep, and mourn, and wrestle in prayerful conflict.

At another time he would contemplate the work of Divine grace within him, and the clear evidences of the indwelling and operation of the Holy Spirit in his soul; and now the cliffs of the wilderness would resound with psalms like a temple of God, and with pious hymns of thanks-giving, which vibrated strangely, with the mountain echo, far into the depths of his solitude.

Let no one be too much cast down, should the Lord ever direct him to the wilderness by the river Jordan, and to the brook Cherith: for he still is accustomed to do so with his children in a variety of ways.

- If he visit us with sickness, so that we must be alone upon our bed and in our chamber;

- If our friends forsake us and forget us;

- If we become regarded as outcasts, having neither house nor heart opened to us any longer;

- If we are called to sojourn in Mesech, and to dwell among those who are of a different mind from ourselves, who do not understand us, and who ridicule our way of life.

- In such situations we are shut in with Elijah by the brook Cherith. But be not alarmed; rather be of good courage! Such seclusion, or exclusion, how blissful and salutary may it become!

Numberless Christians have been constrained to declare that it was in their imprisonment, or place of exile-in their lonely sick chamber, or in the days when they were forsaken by men and cast out by the world, that they entered really into their own hearts, and ascertained their true spiritual state.

The leaven of the Pharisees was then put away from them, and worship was no longer paid to an imaginary Savior. They began to long in earnest for close communion with him; and the wrestling prayer of Jacob, lasting until daybreak, which they had only talked of before, now became a matter of reality and experience, an event in their own personal history. And a hundred other things pertaining to inward religion, which they had only in imagination appropriated hitherto, were then individually realized.

They were then also first truly brought into the number of those sheep who hear His voice, and were never so conscious that he really lives and speaks to his children, and walks and dwells with them: nor did they ever experience his tender consolation and support, or ever feel his love so strongly and unequivocally, as at that very time when their path was so solitary and through the wilderness, when they were obliged to be with their Lord alone.

Therefore be encouraged, ye who dwell by the brook Cherith, in solitudes, for God's dew can drop upon the dwellings of the wilderness, as David sings; and the pastures in the wilderness do spring with blessings.

"Thou shalt drink of the brook, and the ravens shall feed thee there." Thus said the Lord; and, however marvelous and unheard of it might sound, Elijah bowed himself and believed, and his faith did not deceive him: all that the Lord had promised was "Yea and Amen," and nothing remained unfulfilled.

It was not long before the whole country was like a heath, and fields and woods became scorched as by fire. One spot alone continued green and cool; that spot was the prophet's rocky vale. Every fountain was exhausted, and every forest stream dried up by the sultry heat; one brook alone continued to flow-the brook Cherith- that remained as fresh and as full as if nothing had happened. And the ravens also fulfilled their office.

How wonderful! Those ravenous carrion birds, impure according to the law, and so voracious and unfeeling that they would leave their own young to starve, did not God interpose, who asks, in the book of Job, "Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat" (Job 38:41); these creatures we find employed here in an occupation of disinterested kindness; dead, as it were, to the natural voracity of their species, coming and going at God's bidding, denying their own appetites and performing a most beneficent office.

No sooner does the morning dawn in Cherith's rocky vale, than their cry is heard aloft in the trees; and when Elijah wakes, he beholds the provision for the day lying before him. And when the evening shades advance, these black livery servants again appear, laden with meat and bread. And this takes place not merely once, but a whole year round, without intermission.

O wisdom of God, which carnal reason would account foolishness, how precious art thou! Let the world imagine to itself a magnificent Deity whose government is only general; we adhere to the Lord God of Elijah, and rejoice in his providential superintendence of the smallest matters.

And this God still liveth, a living Savior, who is always to be found of them that seek him, and is nigh unto them that call upon him; and whose delights are with the sons of men. About his servants and handmaids is encamped a mighty host; and when he saith, " Come!" they come; or "Go!" they go: and there has been no end to his wonders, even to this day.

Who else was it but the God of Elijah, who, only a short time ago, in our neighborhood, so kindly delivered a poor man out of his distress-not indeed by a raven, but by a poor singing-bird? You are acquainted with the circumstance. The man was sitting, early in the morning, at his house-door; his eyes were red with weeping, and his heart cried to heaven-for he was expecting an officer to come and distrain him for small debt. And whilst sitting thus with his heavy heart, a little bird flew through the street, fluttering up and down, as if in distress, until at length, quick as an arrow, it flew over the good man's head in his cottage, and perched itself on an empty cup board.

The good man, who little imagined who had sent him the bird, closed the door, caught the bird, and placed it in a cage, where it immediate began to sing very sweetly, and it seemed to the man as if it were the tune of a favorite hymn, "Fear thou not when darkness reigns;" and as he listened to it, he found it soothe and comfort his mind.

Suddenly someone knocked at his door. "Ah, it is the officer," thought the man, and was sore afraid. But no, it was the servant of a respectable lady, who said that the neighbors had seen a bird fly into his house, and she wished to know if he had caught it.

"O yes," answered the man, "and here it is:" and the bird was carried away. A few minutes after, the servant came again. "You have done my mistress a great service," said he; "she sets a high value upon the bird, which had escaped from her. She is much obliged to you, and requests you to accept this trifle, with her thanks."

The poor man received it thankfully, and it proved to be neither more nor less than the sum he owed! And when the officer came, he said, "Here is the amount of the debt; now leave me in peace, for God has sent it me."

Something very similar was experienced by another brother, who is perhaps now present, and could testify to the fact. He had at one time the grief to see his little child crying for hunger, and there was not a morsel of bread left in the house, nor a penny in his pocket, and his heart was bursting with sorrow. He crept away into a solitary corner, and prayed, with many tears, to that God who feedeth the young ravens and clothes the lilies of the field; he prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread!" with an earnestness which, perhaps, he had never felt before.

And on rising up from prayer in a comfortable state of mind and going to his house-door, a dog came running along with a piece of meat in his mouth, and on arriving at the poor man's threshold he let it drop, and ran off.

The Lord has sent us this," said the man, as he took it up from the ground. "A gracious God!" exclaimed he, as he brought it into the room; when it was cooked and laid upon the dish, and hungry people sat round it, and a blessing had been asked, it was to them all as memorable an

occasion as if they had been partaking of the paschal lamb.

The God of Elijah still lives! and under this truth I may rank your own experience also, my dear friends, which some of you have related to me; that, in distressing necessities and perplexities, help has often come to you in a wonderful manner, from persons who were not only indifferent to you, but even disaffected towards you, and bore you some ill-will; from unbelievers, who, in general, cannot endure them that are “quiet in the land” (Psalms 35:20).

But, all at once, it suddenly occurred to one, he himself knew not how, that he must bring you some particular thing; or another could not sleep for the thought of not having done something for you, and however much he strove to drive the idea from his mind, he could not succeed in kicking against the pricks.

Yes, He who turneth men’s hearts as the rivers of water, sends them to your aid; and his purpose who shall defeat?

What they did for you, was not done because they intended it, but because they were constrained by conscience, that is, by the God of conscience; and thus you experience that the God of Elijah, who can provide for his servants even by the ravens still lives.

Therefore let every child of God be strong and of good courage! Only believe, ye who are at the brook Cherith and in the wilderness! For faith can supply the want of everything temporal; and faith is the grave of care.

And remember, deal friends, that it is in vain for you to rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows; for as David says, “He giveth it to his beloved sleeping” (German version) Psalms 127:2.

May He who giveth songs in the night, teach us all the song of the royal psalmist, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety!” (Psalms 4:8) ~ end of chapter 2 ~

02.03. The Departure for Zarephath

The Departure for Zarephath

CHAPTER THREE

Once, when the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, he delivered them into the hands of the Midianites, a fierce and warlike people; these God employed to drive back his erring and straying sheep under the crook of the Chief Shepherd. There was great distress in Israel at that time. A considerable number of the people forsook house and home, fled to the woods and mountains, or skulked into caverns and rocks; and a few entrenched themselves in deserted fortifications! Whenever they attempted to cultivate the land, the Midianites soon fell upon them, like locusts, destroying all growth in the field, and leaving no sustenance for man or beast. This severe scourge produced its effect. The Israelites acknowledged their sin and smote upon the thigh; every hand was etched to heaven and every tongue prayed, “Return, O Lord, to thine oppressed inheritance!” And God, who is faithful, heard them, and sent them relief.

In the field of Ophrah stood a solitary oak, near it was a threshing-floor. A young husbandman was there threshing his father’s corn, and while thus engaged he had to look about him every moment with no little anxiety, for he had reason to fear being surprised by the marauding Midianites. His name was Gideon. In the midst of his busy and anxious occupation he is surprised by the sudden appearance of a stranger of benevolent and noble aspect. The stranger sat down beneath the oak and said, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor!”

Gideon, with the regard of a true Israelite for his country, replied, “O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges 6:12-13).

The history then informs us that the Lord looked upon him and said, “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14)

“Go in this thy might,” said the Lord, as he cast upon him a look of love and grace. He meant not, O Gideon, that thou shouldst subdue the enemy in thine own strength. He directed thee to His strength, and not thine own.

It is as if he had said, “Be this thy strength, that I have regarded thee graciously; and let it encourage thee, let it suffice for thee, that thou hast found grace in eyes of the Lord. Go in this thy strength, and conquer!”

O invaluable assurance! Only possess the assurance that he is graciously inclined toward thee, and thou mayest well be a stranger to fear. Only appropriate such a testimony, that he is thy Beloved, that he is thy Friend, and no storms or tempests need dismay thee any more; thou mayest laugh at the shaking of the spear; yes, though there were thousands of deaths encompassing thee, or thousands of difficulties like mountains surrounding thee-they will all be

surmounted. Falter not at thine own natural weakness, be not anxious about thy own ability. Weak or strong, armed or unarmed; in these respects the race is not here to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.

The strength of Immanuel is thine, his love is like a victorious banner over thee; his word is thy sword, his salvation thy helmet, his righteousness thy breastplate; faith in him is thy shield and buckler: he is all that thou requirest; his grace is sufficient for thee.

Whithersoever he sends thee- be it into the fire of temptation or into the waters of affliction-be it into domestic embarrassments and necessities, or into severe conflicts and difficult undertakings-nay, were it even into agony and death-yet his having graciously looked upon thee, and his having made thee sensible of his love, may induce thee to go; yes, go in this thy might! Thou hast no real cause for fear-none for distrust. Thy Saviour will accompany thee and protect thee, because he loveth thee. He whose love is stronger than death, will make all thy way plain before thee. Thus was it that Elijah went to the brook Cherith, in the strength of that kindness and favor which he too had received from his Lord. We are now to view him entering upon a new path of duty, equally painful and difficult in itself, but rendered smooth and easy by the strength of which we have been speaking. Yea, it becomes a path of blessing, because the Lord is with him.

“And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

“Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

“And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:7-16).

We find the prophet still at the brook Cherith. He would not leave his solitude till the Lord bade him remove. The howling wilderness was not too dreary for him; because God was with him. He was quite content to dwell among the rocks, and to rest upon a couch of turf; knowing well, that “the Lord will provide.” He was regularly supplied with sustenance, morning and evening, by his faithful messengers, whose very cry as they approached him would serve to awaken his heart to songs of thanksgiving and praise. The little brook of Cherith, whose very name, in the Hebrew language, denotes drought, as if it were generally more apt to dry up than most other brooks, had run on till now, and surely by a miracle; but it was only for an appointed time; for now we behold the scene changing. The change at its commencement was most unexpected and painful-it was also in its

further development very mysterious-but its result was as delightful to man as it was glorious to God.

Three subjects here invite our consideration:

I. Elijah's perplexity;

II. His departure from Cherith;

III. Its blessed issue.

I. He had now, during a whole year, been miraculously fed and preserved

But a miracle perpetuated soon ceases to appear a miracle. And when it begins to be regarded as a matter of course, it fails of its due impression, and God's hand or Presence in it is liable to be overlooked. There is an Eastern fable, of a boy having challenged his teacher to prove to him the existence of God by working a miracle.

The teacher got a large vessel filled with earth, wherein he deposited a kernel in the boy's presence, and bade him pay attention. In the place where the kernel was put a green shoot suddenly appeared, the shoot became a stem, the stem put forth leaves and branches, which soon spread over the whole apartment. It then budded with blossoms, which dropping off, left golden fruits in their place, and in the short space of one hour there stood a noble tree in the place of the little seed. The youth, overcome with amazement, exclaimed "Now I know that there is a God, for I have seen his power!" The teacher smiled at him and said, "Simple child, do you only now believe? Does not what you have just beheld take place in innumerable instances, year after year, only by a slower process? But is it the less marvelous on that account?"

Now we, my friends, are but too often like such simple children. Suppose at rising in the morning we found a loaf added to our provisions, which we could be certain that neither we nor any human being had put there-we should then have no difficulty in saying that the Lord had sent it. Yet, we actually find such a loaf every morning added to our provisions, and it is equally true that God has sent it: but because he has sent it in a less direct and extraordinary manner, namely, by strengthening our own powers and blessing our labor to obtain it, and because this is an ordinary case, what is taking place all the world over, therefore, however unreasonable such a therefore may be, we find it difficult to realize in it his goodness, his providence, and himself. And let me tell you, that supposing he were to manifest himself in any extraordinary manner, so as to compel us to exclaim,

"This is indeed a marvelous interposition of God;" yet let any such manifestation only become continual, and it will be no longer accounted marvelous; yea, it will be well if it do not cease to be regarded even as Divine. The manna falls once or twice in the wilderness, and it is wondrous in the eyes of all, and the Lord God is praised. But if it falls every day, its coming is a matter of course; and men learn to contemplate it as a natural event; they behold the manna, but not the hand that sends it. Water is produced miraculously from the rock; and if it be succeeded by heat and drought, men learn in some measure to give God the glory. But the smitten rock in the wilderness virtually follows the Israelitish host; its streams attend them in their daily course; they have no lack of water; and what is the consequence? They are ungrateful: and so are we. God is daily working wonders for us also, but in order to learn this, it is good for us sometimes to undergo

privations.

Not that we mean to affirm this respecting Elijah at the brook Cherith. Far be it from us to think so ill of him. But the apostle James says, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are;” and to any one like ourselves it is very possible for length of time to weaken the impression of what is really wonderful, strengthening to faith, and elevating to the affections; so that Elijah himself might possibly have begun to think, “Ah! This brook flows on only like other rivulets-that is, as long as its spring is supplied!” Thus it is that we children of men are too much disposed to consider things; thus are we apt to put the Divine longsuffering to the test, and as we account it a small thing to weary men, we are fain to weary our God also.

But among the many kind offices which our gracious God has taken upon himself for his children’s sake, there is that which he mentions in Isaiah 46:4, “Even to hoar hairs will I carry you” Indeed, how continually has he something to bear with in our conduct! And as he knows how easily a blessing perpetuated ceases to be a blessing, how wisely does he provide, in his faithful love, that there shall be no lack of changes in our earthly course! Hence he leads us through incessant alternations, as it were, of summer and winter, day and night, rain and sunshine, trouble and help, anguish and deliverance. It is thus that he preserves us in spiritual health, and prevents our wandering from himself. For thus we have always something to transact with him; there is constantly something to be asked of him, or something to thank him for; some deliverance from trouble, or some increased humiliation of spirit, some renewed watchfulness, or some more faithful waiting upon him is always needed. Doubtless this was one reason why our gracious God led, the prophet Elijah in such a circuitous way, and gave him to experience so many vicissitudes. How precariously changeful does his life appear! How interwoven with various necessities! Yet, on this very account it abounded in real and lasting blessings.

Our present text commences with the word, “And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up.” From this it might be supposed the Elijah was only a short time in the wilderness; but this was not the case. In Genesis 4:3, immediately after mention of the birth of Cain and Abel we read, “It came to pass, after a while, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.” Here the expression “after a while” cannot mean a short time, but must indicate a period of several years. And in the history before us the expression “after a while” denotes at least a whole year, for so long does Elijah appear to have continued in the wilderness.

For we learn from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, Luke 4:25, as well as from the apostle James, James 5:17, that the drought prevailed during three years and six months. Now we find, from 1 Kings 18:1 that the time when the drought ceased was in the third year of the prophet’s residence at Zarephath. Supposing him, therefore, to have been two years and six months at Zarephath, where could he have spent the remaining year, except at the brook Cherith!

That year had now passed over, by the help of God, at one time in faith, at another in sight, certainly under many difficulties, but, on the whole, a thousand times better and more pleasantly than Elijah had probably expected at the commencement. How long he should still remain there he knew not-that he left to God. Perhaps it might be the whole time of the famine. “Well, be it so, it be the Lord’s will!” He had hitherto wanted nothing. The ravens did their office; the brook continued to flow, and if it had flowed this year, why should it dry up the next? Such were probably the prophet’s pious thoughts at the opening of a new year upon him in the wilderness. But ere long the flow of

the brook begins to diminish, and Elijah perhaps can scarcely believe what his eyes behold.

Did not God say, “Thou shalt drink of the brook,” and thus virtually promise that water should not fail him? We may well imagine him now observing the brook more accurately. Yes-it is so-the brook is diminishing daily, the bed of the rivulet begins to appear, and soon, where water flowed, all is become dry. “What meaneth this?” Even an Elijah might well cast in his mind what manner of providential dealing this should be.

At last water was no longer to be found. O the depths of God! O what peculiar guidance! What a severe trial! “What meaneth it?-to be preserved so long, and now apparently forsaken? Such sure promises, yet such a result! Where is the Lord God of Israel? Am I no longer his prophet? Have I sinned against him, that I am now deserted? Does it repent him that he has employed me?”

Thus might he have thought; and who can say what other imaginations corrupt nature might have suggested, and how the prophet himself might have begun inwardly to complain? Elijah was evidently in a great strait, for death, by thirst, seemed imminent; and what is more, the temptation to false notions and hard thoughts of God was near, to which, if he had yielded, his faith had then dried up, and his confidence had disappeared, like the brook.

Yes, my dear brethren, it is one of the sorest trials that can possibly befall us, when having been placed by the kind providence of God in the midst of peculiar comforts, and just beginning to enjoy them with lively gratitude and hope, we are suddenly torn from them, or bereft of all. Our harp is then turned into mourning and our joy to heaviness.

Let us suppose any one of you to be under severe domestic affliction or embarrassment, in debt for instance, and threatened with an arrest in default of immediate payment. You wrestle with God in prayer that he would help you, and his providence sends you the very help you want.

Your heart is then melted with thankfulness, and you are disposed to say, “Truly the Lord liveth and seeth me; he heareth and answereth prayer!”

But suppose that very night your house is broken into, your money stolen, and all your embarrassment returns. Again, suppose that, with much laborious industry, you have acquired the means of renting a small farm: you employ your whole little capital upon it, and you pray God that it would please him to bless your labor with increase, for the support of yourself and your family. And then you behold the seed sprung up, and your fields beautifully verdant. “Thanks be to God,” you will say, “I now see his goodness to his creatures.” But in a few more weeks, perhaps a dry summer or a Reason of excessive rain disappoints you of all.

What is your language now, in cases of this sort? D o you not call these hard trials, and account them the more severe because they have come upon you in the ordinary way of Providence? Had they been more like Job’s afflictions, something out of the common way, you are apt to imagine you could have borne them better; you would then have seen that they came from God, and you are perhaps vain enough to suppose you would have displayed extraordinary patience under them. For instance, had the money which you had so wonderfully received been melted in your coffer by a thunderbolt, then you would have said, “The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away” (Job 1:21). But now, as it has been carried off by thieves, you are apt to think these words of Job inapplicable to your own case; and as you cannot think it is the Lord who has taken it away, you

are presently open to another suggestion; “ Perhaps it was not the Lord who gave it me, else why should he not have preserved it to me?” In instances like these it is too easy to imagine that God has well-nigh forgotten us, and that we have only been self-deceived in ascribing this and that benefit to his special kindness and love; that they must have been purely accidental, though at the time they appeared marvelous tokens of Divine favor.

In some such manner might Elijah’s trial of faith have been aggravated by the slow and natural exhaustion of the brook Cherith. Had its stream been discontinued supernaturally and at once, there had been no difficulty in seeing the Lord’s hand in this event; but in the present case he might have been tempted by the imagination that nature was very much left to herself. Indeed, the secondary cause why the brook dried up is mentioned in the text; for we read, it “dried up because there had been no rain in the land:” and perhaps this is added by the inspired penman, to give us a clearer idea of the trouble which befell Elijah. We can well suppose that it occasioned him no small trial and conflict, and put him upon a severe examination of himself. Corrupt nature might also be stirred within him, and suggest many gloomy and hard thoughts of God. But Elijah surmounted them all, kept his faith in exercise, and thus obtained the victory. The Word of God was his trust; he had not forgotten who it was that said, “Hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan, and thou shalt drink of the brook.” He was silent before God in humble faith; in faith he waited, and by faith he crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.

And ye, my Christian friends, whom I may address as brethren of Elijah by the brook Cherith, and in the wilderness of this world, ye children of God, who are apt enough to sigh when your streams dry up, and when your resources seem exhausted; O, if ye did but patiently wait upon the Lord, how strong would ye become! If ye rested more entirely upon his word, ye would see the glory of God! O that, instead of indulging the feelings of distrust and discontent, we did but reflect upon God’s exceeding great and precious promises in Christ Jesus! Ought the children of faithful Abraham to despond? Ought they who have surnamed themselves by the name of Israel to be faint-hearted?

But the answer to such expostulations too frequently is, that “the heart knoweth its own bitterness” (Proverbs 14:10); and everyone is ready to say “I am the man who hath seen affliction” (Luke 3:1). Alas, my brethren, we too impatiently want “that which is crooked” to be “made straight,” and that which is rough to be made smooth. Yea, we are apt to think our sufferings are directly contrary to the promises of God. But no, fear brethren, this never is, and never can be the fact. What happens to us may be contrary enough our wishes, but can never be contrary to God’s Word.

The truth is, that we have been indulging ideas of our own concerning the manner in which the Lord is to fulfill his promises, and hence arises our mistake. His promises must ever surely come to pass; they are all Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20), but as to how they are to come to pass, this we ought entirely to leave to his own wisdom and love, and in the meantime to abide patiently in him who will do all things well, “He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord and thy Redeemer” (Isaiah 41:14).

The help you are thus taught to expect is such as will always be best for you. It shall be in things temporal, when that is good for you; and it certainly shall always be in things spiritual, which are

far better. When, in a spiritual sense, our brook seems to dry, and we are ready to cry, “Where is The blessedness I knew?” when zeal in the cause of Christ abates, and our devotion dies; when we feel no sensible delight in prayer, and the spirit of praise and thanksgiving is gone; when we see nothing around to awaken and encourage us, and the love of many is waxed cold; these exigencies are trying, severely trying. But remember Him who has said of his vineyard,

“I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; I will even keep it night and day” (Isaiah 27:3). “No really good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psalms 84:11).

He will certainly keep his word. Therefore be of good cheer. Spiritual drought and barrenness, if you feel it, shall be turned into a blessing. Believe, then, that he will keep his word-and as to how he shall keep it, let not the clay be at strife with the potter. Let him do with you as seemeth him good; the end of your song will always be, “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces” (Daniel 9:7).

II. Elijah’s remaining where he was, for the Lord’s sake,

who had directed him thither, is a noble example to ourselves

“He that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16). Elijah waited, and help arrived, but in what manner? With water? With refreshment and consolation? No! but with a command, which, though it might be acquiesced in by faith, could not possibly be agreeable to flesh and blood.

“Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

Reason was now again constrained to quit the field. Elijah is ordered upon along and toilsome journey, through a wild and barren country, in a time of general famine and extreme drought: and this into the land of Zidon, beyond the borders of Israel, among a heathen people enslaved to a vile idolatry, the native country of Jezebel, his bitterest enemy, and the territory of her father, a furious tyrant, also in alliance with Ahab. “And behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

Strange comfort this to mere natural reason! A woman who has herself lost her chief earthly sustainer; a Phoenician, who might be a heathen, against whose idols Elijah was so zealous. Besides, amongst so many widows in the land, how is this widow to be found? This, indeed, was “bringing the blind by a way that they knew not” (Isaiah 42:16). But, “Be still and know that I am God.” Psalms 46:10.

His footsteps are not known: yet most of the paths by which he conducts his servants, though they commence in darkness, or at best in twilight, be brighter as they proceed; by-and-by the dayspring begins to dawn and their course shines more and more unto the perfect day.

Zarephath, which was midway between Zidon and Tyre, may signify “a place of smelting furnaces,” serving to remind us of the furnace of affliction whereby the Lord tries and purifies his people. The prophet’s whole route seemed to lie directly toward this furnace. But it was a Divine direction; it was the Lord’s will; and therefore it was right to go forward in his name. The prophet, perhaps with sorrow, bids a last farewell to his quiet hiding-place, where he had experienced such signal tokens of the help of God’s countenance; he girds up the loins of his mind, takes his pilgrim

staff of the Divine word in the hand of his faith, and sets out for the heathen land. Rough as was his path, it was a way of holiness; no lion was there, nor any ravenous beast could come up thereon. The Lord was with him all the way that he had to go, even the Lord God, who threshes the mountains, rebukes the winds and waves, and revives the spirit of the humble.

III. We soon find him in the neighborhood of Zarephath, and the Lord,

who was there before him, had prepared and arranged all for his reception

He had come near the gate of the city, and lo, the widow woman was there gathering sticks for fuel. The Spirit, perhaps, intimated to him that this was the woman to whom he was directed.

Poor as she appeared, by the occupation which now engaged her, his faith could tell him, that if the Lord had appointed her to sustain him, she would have wherewith to do it. With God, who had fed him a whole year by the ministry of ravens at the brook Cherith, he knew that nothing was impossible. And does not God often take a method of helping us which surpasses all reason and expectation, doing for us exceeding abundantly above whatever we can ask or think, and sending us deliverance by means which appear altogether inadequate; that we may learn to give the praise to him, and that his own name may be glorified.

Thoughts like these no doubt passed through Elijah's mind; and while he fully confided in the Lord as the God of the widow and the fatherless, he found no difficulty in regarding their humble roof as an appropriate dwelling for himself.

"He," therefore, "called to her and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink."

Her readiness to go seems to have encouraged him; for "as she was going to fetch it," he added, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand."

His additional request, however, opened afresh the wounds of this poor widow's heart; she could no longer conceal her feelings. She answered, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not even the smallest loaf of bread: all I have is but an handful of flour in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and lo, I have been gathering a stick or two for a fire on my hearth, that I might dress it for myself and for my Child, as our last meal in this world, that we might eat it and die."

Oh, how affecting and heartrending was this simple tale! We feel it so, even at this moment. But what says Elijah to it? Can he still believe that this is the widow woman whom the Lord has appointed to sustain him? Yes, he is now certain of it. Be it that she is a widow in peculiar distress, having no other companion but her helpless child; all this creates no difficulty in his mind; "Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide." (Genesis 22:14). And, besides, she seems to know his name, for how has she addressed me? "As the Lord God liveth."

What an unusual and sweet sound is this in a strange land, in an idolatrous country! Perhaps she is a secret worshiper of the living God-a rose in the midst of thorns-a hidden dove in the clefts of the rock-a converted soul-one of the few among the heathen whom the Word of the Lord has reached. Oh, happy thought, to find a brother or a sister in the land of Meshech! Whence does she know that the Lord is my God, and that I am his servant? Oh, the marvelous disposal of Divine Providence!"

None but those who have felt it, can know how delightful it is, in a strange country, where there are no ways that direct to Zion, or where they lie waste and deserted, to discover unexpectedly among the children of this world, and as were by the waters of Babylon, some citizen of the Holy Land, some brother or sister in the Lord. Yes, it is an unspeakable delight; and to meet with only one such a person, makes the desert seem to rejoice and blossom as the rose. At such seasons we learn by experience that the children of God are not so deficient in love as they are often supposed to be; we taste the blessedness of that communion in the love of Christ, by which he has enjoined that all men should know we are his true disciples; and occasions of this sort serve to make it manifest.

Yes, what we may here suppose to have been Elijah's joy, is still tasted in our world. God be thanked, that in every known region of the earth, and even where wolves abound and hirelings profess to feed the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd has his sheep, the Lord has hidden ones who know him, and who follow him. And as sheep that pasture on barren plains often bear the finest fleeces, so is it often with the sheep of Christ; and as they know their Shepherd, or rather are known of him, so it is as wonderful as it is delightful to find how readily they know and acknowledge one another.

Elijah perceiving that this was the widow of whom God had spoken to him, hesitated not to address her in the most encouraging manner. He "said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

And now she evinced that she was indeed the widow whom the Lord God of Elijah had appointed to sustain him; for "she went" in faith, "and did according to the Saying of Elijah; and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days."

How blessed is the way of faith!

Behold, then, this man of God cheerfully sitting down in her solitary cottage. Surely "the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous," for "the right hand of the Lord" on their behalf "doeth valiantly" (Psalms 118:15).They rejoice together, not only on account of temporal blessings, but much more on account of those which are spiritual. Israel had lost Elijah, and a poor widow in a heathen land had found him. Thus often does it fare with a people who, though they have been privileged with the most faithful preaching of the Gospel, will not turn unto the Lord with all their heart, and walk uprightly before him. They are cursed with a famine of the Word of God; the children's bread is taken from them, and imparted to others whom they account no better than dogs, who however "will receive it," and are languishing for it.

Indeed our Lord himself thus applies this part of sacred history to the case of the people of Nazareth who refused to receive his ministry: "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow" (Luke 4:25-26).

Here then the prophet dwells quite happy under the widow's roof. All distress has disappeared. The meal is not diminished in the barrel, nor fails the oil in the cruse, according to the word of the

Lord which he spake by Elijah. Neither does their spiritual sustenance fail. Well might this poor widow rejoice in the privilege of sitting daily at the feet of this man of God, for instruction in divine things!

Can we doubt for a moment that the prophet most gladly opened his mouth in divine wisdom, to impart it to the soul of this simple believing sister? Can I doubt that they prayed together, that they read together out of Moses and the prophets, and that they conversed together of the day of Christ, which Abraham saw with gladness?

And would they not, think you, occasionally raise a spiritual song to the honor of their Lord and Saviour? How swiftly and how pleasantly must the hours have passed with them! And well might the angels of God have rejoiced, as no doubt they did, over this little church in the wilderness!

Behold here, then, my brethren, the bright egress and happy termination of a path which commenced in such thick darkness! Only let all the children of God implicitly follow his guidance, and he will assuredly conduct them to a glorious end.

It is a noble testimony which is here borne respecting Elijah when he was commanded away from his retreat at Cherith-it is said of him, “So he arose and went to Zarephath.”

Let it then be equally said of you, to whatever duty the Lord may call you away, “He arose and went!” Be the way ever so laborious or dangerous, still arise, like Elijah, and go. Go cheerfully, in faith, keeping your heart quietly dependent on the Lord, and in the end you will assuredly behold and sing of his goodness.

Though tossed on a sea of troubles, you may lay anchor on the firm foundation of God, which standeth sure.

You have for your security his exceeding great and precious promises, and must say with the psalmist, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!” (Psalms 42:11).

~ end of chapter 3 ~

Chapter 19

02.04. Raising The Widow's Son at Zarephath

Raising The Widow’s Son at Zarephath

CHAPTER FOUR The portion of the narrative which we have now to contemplate, is a striking exemplification of the saying of our blessed Lord, “Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit.”

“And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.

“And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?

“And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?

“And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth” (1 Kings 17:17-24).

Here we have another specimen of God’s manner of guidance, and one of those ways which, though wonderfully dark and mysterious, lead us ultimately to a clearer experience of the Divine goodness and faithfulness.

Come, and let us behold a remarkable work of the Lord, with its glorious results. Here is,

I. The pruning of a branch that bore fruit;

II. Its bearing more fruit;

III. The satisfaction and joy that ensued.

I. We still find the prophet Elijah in the peaceful and

humble dwelling of the widow of Zarephath

He has now passed several months in this quiet retirement. Praise and prayer, holy discourse and offices of kindness, contemplation of God’s Word and Works, occupied his swiftly-gliding days; and these were blessed with renewed manifestations of divine lovingkindness and tender mercies.

Now, we are certain that many among ourselves would be ashamed of what they would consider such an inactive, quiet sort of life, made up of nothing but receiving and enjoying, so that they would reproach themselves for it, and seek again, as soon as possible, the scene of labor and activity.

Elijah was not so intent upon laboring for the meat that perisheth. He had long ago renounced, as vain and absurd, the notion that any value can attach to cares merely human, whether for laying up treasure upon earth, or for acquiring a treasure in heaven by our own supposed meritorious services! He knew that all which men can receive out of God's treasure is a simple and free gift of the most unconditional favor; and therefore he left it entirely with his Lord, whether he would appoint him a goodly heritage in the land of Goshen, under the vine and fig tree, or station him in the desert, or in the midst of militant hosts; all that he desired was to spend and be spent in his service.

"The will of the Lord be done," appears ever to have been his watchword. Whether called to public activity and conflict in his cause, or shut up in privacy, as at Zarephath; and comparatively laid aside, as to all outward respects, he knew with the psalmist, It is vain to rise early and sit up late without God, eating the bread of worldly carefulness, for that he gives to his beloved when they are sleeping?

Thus did Elijah feel cheerfully resigned to spend his appointed term of quietude at Zarephath, to whatever length it should please God to protract it. O that we all had learnt this childlike disposition. Whoever is circumstanced, as it were, like Elijah at Zarephath; whoever is precluded from outward activity and usefulness in the world by want of means and opportunities, or of gifts and influence by weakness or age, let him think with Elijah, that it is the Lord's hand which has laid him aside; and, instead of inwardly repining, let him keep the noiseless tenor of his way with thankfulness to God. And if indeed he lean on the bosom of the Lord Jesus, and can rejoice in the blessings of God's house, let him sit under his shadow with great delight, and be only the more thankful for it.

Let us not think it necessary to the evidence of our sincerity, that we should be sad and sorrowful, much less gloomy or desponding. Continue at Zarephath, fellow Christian, as long as God pleases. Rejoice whilst the bridegroom is with thee: when once he shall be taken from thee, then the time of fasting will come.

Let us pause a moment upon the perpetual miracle experienced in the widow's dwelling: "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail."

By whose care was this? By the care of Him who ruleth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. He it was who replenished the cask and the cruse every morning; and thus blessed his children while they were asleep, and before they could have time to say, "Give us this day our daily bread!" And are not his mercies equally renewed every morning to ourselves?

How graciously does he, in every respect, provide for us; and how minutely does his providence condescend to our meanest wants! Yes, he is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe. What he did at Zarephath, thousands daily experience still, though not just in the same form and manner. And how truly do the children of God experience, in a spiritual way, supplies analogous to those temporal ones which were granted to this Widow! However pressingly their

necessities may be felt, still the bread of life is not spent, neither does their spiritual refreshment fail. He takes care “that thy faith fail not. Mark the words-that it fail not. We do not read that whole sacks of meal were brought into the widow’s house, nor that her oil cruse ran over: all we are told is, that “the meal wasted not;” she daily received as much as she needed; “Neither did the oil fail”

So, perhaps, thou, Christian, wilt not receive any superabundance of believing joyfulness, so as to be enabled to shout for joy in the furnace of affliction: too much would not be good for thee. But rest assured of the faithfulness of thy God, that he will uphold thy faith; this thy compassionate High Priest has implored for thee, as well as for his apostle Peter; and he will daily supply thee with so much patience by daily renewing it, that although thou may occasionally doubt and droop, thou never shalt despair or perish.

A pious writer says, truly and beautifully, “We require just as much patience to wait, as oil is required for our lamps, until the day shall dawn, and the daystar arise in our hearts.”

Delightful, undoubtedly, was the situation of Elijah and the devout widow at Zarephath. But is not usually good that a man’s life should continue flowing on in one and the same easy manner. A long state of prosperity might leave his corrupt nature to become presumptuous and forgetful of its meanness and poverty. Perpetual quietude serves to nourish a false spirit of independence. Long seasons of rest, for sacred musings, are too much open to the intrusion of self-complacency; and therefore, generally, a condition subject to no interruptions or changes is not good for us. Our gracious God knowing this, appoints vicissitude of some kind or other for his children, and pours them, as it has been said, out of one vessel into another, that they may not settle on their 1ees which would only sour and corrupt them. A change of this sort now awaited the favored family at Zarephath. The immediate reason of it is known to God only.

Unexpectedly, in the midst of cheering blessings, a heavy cloud darkened the peaceful cottage. Alas! The widow’s son, her only child, doubly dear to her in consequence of his wonderful preservation from imminent death by famine, “fell sick.” The sickness increased every hour, and the distress of the poor mother was extreme; but her tears prevailed not. Her delight and hope, the dearest object she had on earth, lay extended in the arms of death. How hard! How severe, according to outward appearance! And yet there was nothing but mercy in this event.

Our gracious God intended that this bitter medicine should produce the most salutary effects. It is true that “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

II. For what general purpose, then, was this painful visitation sent?

We may ask such a question, though we must never pry too minutely into the reason of every thing that befalls us; for now we can know but in part. We cannot interpret all God’s dealings at Present. His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters. Clouds and darkness to us are round about him, but of this we may be assured, that “all his works are truth, and his ways judgment,” Or righteousness; and we shall see this more clearly in a better world. At present, we must simply believe and trust in our faithful God, in the midst of our obscurity and darkness.

Yet, in this visitation at Zarephath, his gracious intentions may be guessed at. The widow, we may well believe, was a person of real piety; but then, as it would seem, as in the manner of Lydia, before the Lord opened her heart; or like Cornelius the centurion, and some others. They were acquainted with God in a partial and too superficial manner: they held communion with him, but not enough upon the true foundation. They served the Lord, but more in the way of Martha than in that of Mary. They knew something of God's lovingkindness, but not enough of his grace; not being sufficiently convinced of their own sinfulness, the corruption of their own hearts, and of the immensity of that grace which the Lord had bestowed upon them.

Their religious feelings were probably more natural than spiritual: yet they possibly regarded such feelings with too much confidence, as a proof of their piety; and when we do this, we are hindered in self-knowledge, we deceive ourselves, and remain injuriously ignorant of the relation in which we stand to the God of all grace. In short, they were well affected to godliness in general, but still too far off from God, ignorant of a Mediator and Intercessor, and not enough broken and contrite in heart.

Now, it is a mercy not to be suffered to remain in this condition, for it partakes more of self-deception than of truth. In order, therefore, that this good widow might enter fully into the kingdom of God, it was necessary that the Holy Spirit, who had prepared her heart already, should enable her further to see that God's love is grace-unmerited grace, for the sake of another's work-another's merits. But how could this salutary and humble self-knowledge be conveyed to her heart; and how could it be formed into a vital principle? Two invisible guests break in upon her: the Lord and the Spirit.

- The one visits the widow's house, the other her soul.

- The one inflicts the blow, the other expounds it.

- The one slays her son, and the other makes her sensible of the reason why, namely, that she may know more of herself.

Hence her language to Elijah,

"O thou man of God! art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

See what an overthrow takes place in her spirit. "Thou art come unto me, that my sin might be remembered." It seemed to her as if God had now for the first time looked into her heart:(and indeed it is good to be sensible of his discernment of our inmost souls-to be sensible how entirely all things belonging to us are naked, opened, and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. But many a one, alas, when convinced of this, will still endeavor to make the best of himself in his own eyes. And if he succeed not in so doing, yet he will seek to escape from self-reflection amidst the diversions of surrounding vanities: still, however, he finds no true repose of mind. Thus affliction upon affliction is often necessary for bringing sin to remembrance, that sinners may be effectually awakened, and made alive unto God.

That something of this kind was seen necessary by the God of all grace for the poor widow at Zarephath, seems pretty evident from her exclamation under his chastening hand; "What have I to do With thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come to me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

This is certainly strange language; but, as the language of her heart and feelings, it is very significant. Is it not as if she had said, “Why didst thou come to me? I have reaped this from thy visit that my sins are brought to remembrance and a sense of them overwhelms me. Thou art such a holy man, that neither I nor my house were worthy to entertain thee. Hence God has seen it necessary to punish me for being so bold, and for acting so familiarly with thee, as if we had been thy equals. Surely it is thy coming that has brought all this upon me. A merciful God would not have scrutinized so strictly a poor woman and an insignificant worm like myself, if he had not found me in thy society-if thy abiding with me had not drawn his attention upon me. Ah, why shouldst thou have come unto me! Surely the Lord would not have approached so near to such a poor sinner as I am, if thou hadst not brought his awful presence into my house; for he is always with thee.”

She intended to express something of this kind. Alas, what absurd ideas! And yet, with all this foolishness, what genuine feeling-what self-annihilation-what humility! God’s object is gained-The triumph of truth is won!

III. And now behold the bereaved parent, bowed down with grief and misery

She is sitting with the dead child at her bosom, as if she would again warm his stiffened limbs at her throbbing heart. She weeps at one time for her bereavement, and at another for the multitude of her sins, and knows not which of these distresses her most. Pitiable indeed is her condition! And the prophet we may be sure is touched with heartfelt compassion and sympathy. He probably perceived the design of this visitation, and perceiving also the good effect of it, he delayed not to make preparations for allaying her anguish. He said unto her, “Give me thy son.”

This composure on the part of the prophet must have been impressive to the distressed widow. Surely a ray of hope must have gleamed within her. But will Elijah be able to gratify the hopes he is exciting?

The prophet is sure of the thing in his own mind. He takes the little corpse from the mother’s bosom, hastens boldly with it up into his bedchamber, which no doubt was also his closet for retirement and prayer, lays it upon his own bed, shuts the door, falls on his knees, and applies himself to prayer and to communion with the Lord!

And now, listen! What a prayer it is which he pours forth! It is a prayer that certainly would not pass uncensured by us-that certainly would not escape the criticism and the condemnation of our wisdom, had we heard it from the mouth of any other than such a one as Elijah.

“O Lord my God!” cries he, “hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?” What! Does Elijah speak before the living God, of bringing evil; and does he venture to approach God’s throne with such a question, and with such a complaint? Yes: he speaks as his heart dictates; and if he speaks foolishly-he does it in simplicity, and in faith; and if he pleads too familiarly with God-He does so, encouraged by the blood of the Lamb and the promises of God. It is not for us to censure him, for his prayer was accepted of the Lord. Yet what was its purport? “Lord! Didst thou care to slay this child? Impossible! Thy purpose was to lead the mother through affliction to repentance. This, O Lord, having been accomplish, must the child continue dead? Look, O blessed God, upon this widow graciously, and remember thou that I am her guest. She has shown much kindness unto thy servant: I would gladly recompense her. Do

thou recompense her, for I am poor and have nothing. And O! Remember also am thy prophet. If I am reproached, thou art approached also. Therefore, that thy name may be hallowed, and thy praise magnified upon earth, now, O Lord, hear my prayer."

And having thus expostulated, as it were, with the Lord God, he arose, threw himself upon the dead child, and stretched himself upon it three times, as though he would say, " I will not leave the child, but will await God's answer to my prayer;" and he cried unto the Lord and said, "O Lord my God! I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again;" a prayer you perceive quite positive and unconditional. And what followed upon this holy boldness in prayer? "The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."

But how does this agree with our notions and maxims concerning acceptable prayer? Here we have, as I have said, an unconditional prayer-a prayer too for something temporal-a prayer for a miracle-a prayer without limitations; yet the Lord heard and answered it. Yes, our gracious God does not bind himself to our maxims, suffer himself to be limited by our rules.

"O Lord my God!" cried Elijah in his upper chamber, "let this child's soul come into him again!"

"I will," was virtually the answer he received. And the soul of the child came back; the child began to breathe, and lifted itself up and left the couch of death. And Elijah-with what feelings you may readily imagine-took the child down from his chamber and delivered him to his mother, and in one sentence, short and sweet, as his manner was, said, "See, thy son liveth!" He left it to the Holy Spirit to say to her the rest. But how shall I attempt to describe the feelings of the poor widow?

She sees heaven as it were opened to her, and this not merely in the restoration of the child, who was now alive again in her arms, but also quite in another way. Indeed she cannot yet speak of her child.

"Now by this I know," she exclaimed, "that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." The Word of the Lord! What Word of the Lord was it that Elijah had spoken to her?

This may be easily conjectured. We find here, at the close of the narrative, a new key to the whole. It would seem that Elijah had said something to her, during their acquaintance, which she had hitherto been unable to comprehend or believe, it is not difficult to suppose what it may have been. Elijah had probably soon perceived that the woman, with all her piety, was still not resting upon the true foundation; and he had doubtless availed himself of the peaceful days at Zarephath to make her acquainted with the counsel of God for the salvation of sinners-with the doctrine of the promised Messiah-with the merit of his redemption which he should one day accomplish-with the necessity of faith in him, and with other matters of holy living and conversation connected with it.

These were, it would seem, strange things to her ears, which she knew not how to appreciate, but put them aside, because she as yet felt no need of them. A sense of this need of a Mediator, and of an atonement, was now powerfully awakened in her heart after she had become, through sanctified afflictions, convinced of her sinful and guilty condition; and Elijah's word concerning the atonement and pardon extended to sinners through the merits of the promised Surety, had now, by this renewed testimony to Elijah's prophetic commission, become unquestionably assured as Divine truth to her soul, so that she could heartily yield herself up to it, and rejoice and be glad in it.

And this new faith, confidence, joy, and blissful hope she expressed in the words, “Now I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.”

“I know, I feel, I see, I taste, the true and faithful saying.” Henceforth she stood upon other ground; from being a devout person, she was now evinced to be a daughter of Abraham’s faith. And at the moment when Elijah said to her, “See, thy son liveth,” her heart was fitted to say something greater still- “I know that my Redeemer liveth!” Here was repose after a storm.

Natural self-that which is born of the flesh-is heir only to wrath and condemnation. All our labor expended upon ennobling the “old man with his deeds,” is labor thrown away. However corrupt nature may set itself off, however devoutly it may conduct itself, it remains corrupt nature still; and it is outlawed by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is the accursed thing which must be put away. It must be slain at the foot of the cross. No amendment of it will save us from condemnation. God’s eye regards not its form, but its nature. Nothing can be approved in his sight but the new creature in Christ Jesus. The wise builder commended to our imitation by our Great Teacher, digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock. That rock is Christ. They who are taught by him, and led by his Spirit, are taught and led to rely only on his meritorious obedience unto death, as the all-sufficient atonement for their sins, and to open their ear and their heart to all his instruction and discipline.

And upon this sure foundation is raised the superstructure of all their earnest expectations and blessed hopes of everlasting life.

Ye, therefore, my brethren, who have set yourselves to build, take heed that ye thus build upon Christ the sure foundation. He that with the heart believeth on him, shall never be confounded; but, remember, he purifieth our hearts by faith, and our own lives must give proof of this, to the praise of the glory of his grace, to whom be all glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

02.05. Elijah and Obadiah

Elijah and Obadiah

CHAPTER FIVE

“He must increase, but I must decrease,” said John Baptist to his disciples, when he perceived with regret that their mistaken partiality would have placed him above Jesus, whom John had preceded only as a harbinger and herald proclaiming repentance. He assured them that he himself was only the friend of the bridegroom; that his office was only to awaken the attention of the spiritual bride to the coming of her Beloved, and that having done this, his work was ended.

He added, “The friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:29-30).

The Baptist, in using these tWoe last expressions, compares his Lord to the great luminary of day, but himself to its harbinger or morning star, whose light gradually decreases as the sun arises, till at length it vanishes altogether. Nor has he a wish to be anything more. He would gladly see himself forsaken by his own disciples, if they will only betake themselves to the chief Shepherd, to participate in that salvation which is to be found only with him. “He must increase, but I must decrease.” The Baptist meant that he must decrease, not only in person reputation, but also in office. His own office was only to bring men to Christ, by ushering in the sweet sound of the Gospel.

That the Messiah would come with help and salvation to sinners, John’s disciples knew; some but of them seemed erroneously to imagine that the repentance in which they were exercised, and the life of poverty and austerity which they led, that their fastings, self-denials, and prayers, if they did not possess some atoning power, had in them, at least, something which was to outweigh sin, and the curse belonging to it. Rigid followers as they were of John the Baptist, they had not yet been baptized unto Jesus Christ-baptized unto his death. But John, their master, would teach then that they must die more completely-that they must plunge themselves deeper into free grace. “I,” said he, “must decrease.”

“All that I have enjoined upon you- repentance, self-denial, fasting, and prayer-must lose all credit with you as any ground of God’s reconciliation to you. Ye must seek this in Jesus alone.”

“He must increase.”

Now in this declaration of the Baptist is comprised the whole mystery of practical religion. Does anyone ask what he must do to be saved? The answer is, “Thou must decrease, and Christ must increase;” comply with this, and thou shalt he saved.

- Does anyone inquire wherein consists the Christian’s sanctification? It consists in this, that Christ increases in us and we decrease.

- Does anyone desire to know whether he is advancing in the way of salvation? Observe whether Christ increases, while you decrease, in your own estimation.

By nature we are great-Jesus little; we are strong-Jesus weak. We cannot allow Jesus to be the only Saviour, the Alpha and Omega. The excellency of the power is ours-not his; we take carnal reasoning for our guide, instead of the simple Word and Spirit of God; salvation is looked for in self-love, not in the Saviour alone. But when the Word of the truth of the Gospel effectually penetrates the darkness of our understandings and the blindness of our hearts, the case is reversed.

The “strong man armed” is now become weak; and what appeared so weak before, is felt to be strong, yea, irresistible. The Sun of righteousness now arises upon us with healing in his wings, and we learn more and more to rejoice in his light alone, own strength, virtue, and excellency are things we can no longer bear to hear of. We love to lie humbled before the throne of grace, and to wait for a renewed sense of Divine love, even as “they that watch for the morning.” We now decrease and Jesus has increased with us.

It is natural to suppose that those who have been so thoroughly humbled in repentance and faith, are not likely any more to be puffed up with self-righteousness and vanity. But experience shows that this is a mistaken notion. For the “old Adam” is never entirely dead; though dying as a crucified malefactor, it can still revive and do unutterable mischief.

Yea, many a one, even after his conversion, has built anew the things which had been destroyed: he has been permitting himself to increase, and Christ to decrease. To mention only a few examples of this falling away-one increases by his ascetic exercises; another, by the enlargement of his knowledge; another in self-complacency, borrowed from his own influential popularity or the extent of his beneficent exertions; another thinks much of his own devotional feeling and of I know not what besides. In such things a man insensibly grows so pious and holy, that these things become gain to him, and are no longer accounted loss for Christ.

Are we not, then, to increase in sanctification? Yes! Grow as the palm-tree; but in self-estimation we must ever be only as the hyssop on the wall; we must daily become less and less, weaker and weaker in our own eyes, feeling more and more in want of the Lord’s staff for our support; otherwise we have set out in a wrong direction. Children of God must “grow up into him in all things who is the Head, even Christ.”

The beloved of the Lord, those who are really led by the Spirit of God, are ever gradually descending in self-humiliation. An exemplification of these introductory remarks will be found in the portion of Elijah’s history which we now proceed to consider.

“And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.

“And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)

“And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.

“And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD’S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me.

“And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah” (1 Kings 18:1-16)

We have now to accompany the prophet once more into the stormy theatre of public life.

I. We find him, at the commandment of the Lord, departing from Zarephath.

II. We learn what was passing at this time in the court of Samaria;

III. We have the meeting of Elijah and Obadiah.

I. The prophet had been tWoe years and some months at Zarephath The text expresses the time as “many days,” though they seemed perhaps to Elijah but a few. But, when we consider how rapidly storms and troubles have generally succeeded each other, in the experience of God’s most eminent servants, it was a long time for Elijah to have a serene sky, with the exception of some fleeting clouds, for more than tWoe years together. For this was a length of tranquility with which not many of the active servants of God have been privileged.

In such a season of spiritual as well as natural dearth, Elijah must surely have felt as we should do in having to quit, perhaps forever, this peaceful abode of a pious friend. For the cloud of adversity had burst in blessings on that humble dwelling.

The widow, as we have seen, had become to him a real sister in the Lord, of one mind with him, in the truest and holiest acceptation; they enjoyed mutual fellowship in God, and in his word of atonement; and who shall say that Divine grace had not already begun to appear in the widow’s child, restored as he had now been from death itself? From that moment, perhaps, he had begun to live indeed.

“The word of the Lord,” however, “came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself to Ahab.”

Thus things may be frequently contrary to our natural inclinations; but these inclinations are as often but of little worth. Our gracious God has better intentions concerning us, than we can have for ourselves. We should therefore follow the leadings of his providence at every step, and confide in God as all-wise and good, that he will not and cannot deceive us. “He is a rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

“Go, show thyself unto Ahab.”

Had Elijah now conferred with flesh and blood, this would have seemed to him like a command to plunge into the raging waves of the sea, or to walk into a lion’s den. He had to present himself to a wicked and idolatrous king, a tyrant armed with despotic power, whose personal enmity against him had been increasing for at least three years and a half, and had been doubly aggravated by the distress of the country, of which Elijah was reputed to be the author.

During all this time had Ahab been intent upon apprehending him; had used every effort to trace out his residence; had searched through his own as well as all the neighboring states, and had taken an oath from the different tribes and governments that they had not found him; and yet all his efforts had been unavailing. How vexatious to himself, and what a reflection upon absolute power! If the wrath of a king be as messengers of death, what had Elijah to expect from such a king as Ahab? And yet he receives the brief and positive direction, “Go, show thyself unto him!”

But let no one suppose that the Lord ever expects what is above human nature from any of his children, without imparting, at the same time, sufficient grace and strength for the purpose. Let no one; therefore, imagine that he requires us to fight a fight of faith without giving us faith to do so; or that he will lead us into any difficulty and trial without making provision for our support and encouragement.

Yea, even should there be forced from us the agonizing cry “Why hast thou forsaken me?” he will enable us to prefix to it by appropriating faith “My God! My God!” which will be enough to keep us from sinking.

He leads none of his children into the valley of the shadow of death without becoming to them their rod and staff. Besides, however thick the darkness may be, it is always relieved by some little ray of light.

The support he gave to Abraham in his gloomy way to Mount Moriah, was not only by the general belief that whatever God does, he does well; but by the particular turn given to Abraham’s faith, that God would restore his Isaac again to life. This sweetened his three days’ journey not a little.

To Job was given a peculiarly clear and joyful expectation of the final result of his sufferings and of the day of resurrection. “I know,” said he, “that my redeemer liveth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Such a visitation preserved his spirit.

And thus Elijah, on this arduous path of faith, which directed him to Ahab, was supported by the promise, “I will send rain upon the earth.” He could therefore thank God and take courage. He could depart from Zarephath as a messenger of joy, and carry a blessing with him. Yes, though the horrors of drought and famine, though faces emaciated with hunger and thirst might well have made him shudder on the way; though the thought of Ahab’s deadly resentment, and perhaps of an infuriated populace, might well have forced its way upon his mind, he could be cheered by the

assurance of his commission to announce the return of rain, and by the hope that many would at length give up their hateful idolatry, and humble themselves before the God of their fathers. Such hopes and prospects we can easily imagine would at least have rendered his painful duty more tolerable.

“Show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.”

The Lord had condescendingly commissioned his prophet to announce the chastisement of drought upon the land, and even to say, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, there shall not he dew nor rain these years but according to my word” and now, therefore, it was to be at Elijah’s word that the dew and rain should return. Had these blessings returned without Elijah’s mediation, it would of course have been concluded that Elijah was a false prophet and a boaster; the priests of Baal would have attributed the deliverance to their idol, and would have praised Baal as triumphant over God.

In order, therefore, not to miss the sole object of this grievous visitation, and that Baal might be confounded and the Lord glorified, it was indispensably necessary that Elijah, by a public word, should remove the drought as a complete proof that his Lord was the true and the living God. Consequently, it was now “Go, show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.”

“And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab.” We see, then, the man of God again entering with firm step on his public career of faith, surrounded by a thousand temporal dangers and difficulties, as he had been proscribed as an outlaw throughout the nation, yea, as a troubler of Israel; nevertheless, he went at the commandment of the Lord and the power of the Lord was with him.

II. While Elijah was on his way from Zarephath, king Ahab, at Samaria,

was also setting out on a journey through the land.

Elijah’s errand was for the honor of the Lord his God; that of Ahab was for his cattle, particularly for his horses and mules. This occasion makes us acquainted with another very pleasing and interesting character, namely, with Obadiah, a man of high rank, holding the office of chamberlain or steward of the king’s household. Hence what is here written of Him is the more remarkable, that “he feared the Lord greatly.”

If our discovery of a devout widow in a heathen land, between Tyre and Zidon, occasions our grateful admiration, how much more pleasing is our surprise to find a real servant of the Lord retained in one of the most scandalously corrupt courts ever noticed in history!

Here we see that godliness is not a plant which, as many suppose, must necessarily be reared in the conservatories of human education, admonition, and good example; how, then, could a godly man have existed in Samaria? The children of God are not the mere creatures of circumstances; the state of things in Samaria was just adapted to form Obadiah and everyone else into a child of the devil. The Lord “forms a people for himself, to show forth his praise,” when and where it pleaseth him, as Isaiah 43:18-21. As “He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy,” and is gracious to whom he will be gracious; so, whoever desires to be as Obadiah, the Lord’s servant, cannot be prevented by unfavorable circumstances from becoming so. Thus the fear of God, faith and adoption, are the good part that cannot be taken away by thieves that break through and steal, neither devoured by moth and rust, nor merged and lost in the iniquities of the country we

live in. Obadiah was enabled to keep that good thing which was committed to him, though in an earthen vessel, safely amidst all these dangers.

It was greatly that he feared the Lord. This is indeed a noble testimonial concerning him, for truly it was something great to fear the Lord with all his heart, at a time and in a country wherein the true worshipers of the Lord were exposed to public scorn and derision. It was also something great to adhere faithfully to the Lord, when surrounded by persons bitterly prejudiced against real godliness, and by religious and political institutions set up in direct opposition to the true worship and service of God. To abide in the faith, at a court where the god of this world had blinded the eyes of those in power and influence, and had thus spread every snare and net, every possible temptation to fall away, every possible incentive to vice and iniquity-this was surely something great in Obadiah; especially as he occupied a post of honor and responsibility which drew so many eyes upon him, and in which his good or bad fortune, as it is called, depended solely on the favor of his monarch; a situation which must have obliged him to have frequent intercourse with the most profligate among the great; yet he held on his course, notwithstanding all these difficulties; he feared God not by halves, but he “followed the Lord fully” as he was no time-server, but a decided Israelite; for all this may be inferred from the word “greatly.”

Let this picture of Obadiah be held up to the consideration of those who are so ready to object that their situation and circumstances prevent them from faithfully serving God. This wretched excuse has no other origin than the blindness and deceitfulness of the human heart. Under any circumstances, however favorable, true piety is not indebted to these, but to the grace of God alone; and those who seek and partake of this, serve God in all situations.

For what should hinder them? Did our objectors complain that they cannot serve God because of the corruption of their own hearts, this were a complaint that we might listen to, but thus to complain of outward circumstances is a fearful sign of spiritual death. True Divine life in the soul has a fire in it that burns up this stubble of circumstances. There is a necessity in the case; a necessity which is not to be restrained or checked, much less overpowered, by worldly circumstances.

One signal instance of Obadiah’s substantial piety is here recorded.

Jezebel had endeavored to extirpate from the land every prophet of the Lord, and had already caused many of them to be slain. On this perilous occasion Obadiah was not inactive, but his activity was employed in the rescue of as many men of the Lord’s prophets as possible, and he saved a hundred of them from the iron grip of Jezebel. He “hid them by fifties in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” The hazard or expense of his undertaking proved no obstacle with him; his love of the brethren constrained him. And does not our blessed Saviour say, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.” Go, then, brethren, and do likewise, whenever it is necessary. The prince of this world, who was a murderer from the beginning, is still awake, and is exciting, in various places, rancorous opposition to the truth of the Gospel.

Spiritual wickedness is in many high places, as well as in many humble dwellings. Many a preacher may, ere long, be forced to resign his pulpit; many a professor his chair; many a mechanic his employment, and many a servant his situation, because he is a true believer in Christ, and a sincere follower of his example. Therefore forsake not the assembling of yourselves

together, ye children of God, for mutual edification and succor. Remember Obadiah. If God continues to spare us, whatever blessings of his goodness we enjoy, let them be shared by any of our distressed brethren, for they are fellowheirs with us of our Redeemer's kingdom.

We return to the narrative. "And Ahab called Obadiah" and commissioned him upon a business to be executed in concert with himself. How extraordinary, that a man like Obadiah should be in such favor with a wicked man, and with an Ahab, for it could not have been unknown to himself, or to his court, that Obadiah "feared the Lord greatly." And this scripture testimony to him is utterly irreconcilable with the supposition that he could dissemble either with the tyrant himself, or with anyone else. We can therefore only account for this by supposing that his integrity, activity, and firmness were things divinely overruled to restrain the most arrogant and rancorous foes and scoffers within the bounds of a certain respect and reverence. Ahab probably had discernment enough to perceive that, among all his courtiers, he had not another such a man as Obadiah; and those courtiers, too, might have been conscious that there was no one of themselves in whom such confidence could be placed as in this Israelite of the ancient school; and though the king might laugh at his religion, he felt that he could not do without him. And is there not something in every true Christian that extorts at least a tacit acknowledgment, from the bitterest enemies; a "light" to which, though it "doth make manifest" their darkness, they are unable to refuse a portion of their esteem and admiration? Yea, it has often happened that eminently pious men have been singularly honored for their conduct by these who could not understand its principles, and whose own lives were often directly contrary to them.

"Go into the country," said Ahab to Obadiah, "unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts."

Lo, the only effect of this long continued chastisement of the Almighty was an anxiety for the preservation of his stud! To such obduracy can the hearts of the children of men be brought. Neither afflictions, nor miracles, nor admonitions, nor temporal mercies, are sufficient of themselves to restore the spiritually dead to life. How often are we apt to think concerning persons under some peculiar visitation, that surely now they will be changed and softened, and brought to reflection! We make inquiries, we take pains to ascertain the result; and lo! where we hoped at length to find some serious thought about God and eternity, only cares similar to those of Ahab engage their minds; and instead of the holy emotions, for which we sought- instead of sighs, prayers, and serious thoughts of eternity, we see only a multitude of low desires and cares, bearing them down the stream of life into the boundless invisible ocean. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him" (Proverbs 27:22). May Almighty grace have compassion upon us!

Obadiah readily enters upon the business to which his sovereign had commissioned him, and which he could do most conscientiously. Yet-again the question recurs to our minds-how could Obadiah bear to continue in the service of such a ruler, and among the vile and wicked men of which the court was composed? He must have mourned many an hour in secret over the wicked, and must often sighed in solitude, "Woe is me, that I constrained to sojourn in Mesech, and to dwell in the tents of Kedar."

“In the world ye shall have tribulation” and Obadiah doubtless experienced this tribulation of God’s children, resident as he was among those who were strangers to true the God of Israel. But Obadiah could not adopt the convenient maxim, which enjoins flight from our calling, when abiding in it is disagreeable.

“My God,” he would consider, “has placed me here for reasons best known to himself; and ii is an easy thing for him to preserve me, though my soul be among lions.” Here, therefore, he remained for the Lord’s sake. And what can be done better by you, who may find yourselves in a similar situation? However much evil you are obliged to be eyewitnesses of, whatever disagreeableness you may experience, and however you may be ridiculed or oppressed, let such be no reasons for removing of your own accord from the post which God’s providence has assigned you.

Endure for the Lord’s sake, until he himself, by his providence deliver you. If you are thrust out, or if circumstances and connections necessarily produce change in your situation, then remove with an easy conscience, for the Lord has called you.

But, until then, endure, and flourish as a lily among the thorns; be as the salt of the earth to a corrupt mass, and be as a lighthouse to benighted mariners; for, through Divine grace, you may thus serve to direct many passengers, through the hidden rocks and quicksands of this troublesome world, to the haven of rest.

And how much soever, the raging waves of the sea may foam around you, “He that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep, and the angel of the Lord is about them that fear him. His faithfulness and truth is their shield and buckler. Blessed are those who put their trust under the shadow of his wings!”

III. Ahab and Obadiah had now “divided the land between them

to pass throughout it” And “Ahab went one way by himself,” while “Obadiah went another way by himself.” It was of the Lord’s peculiar providence that the king thus went in person, as he was thus made to witness something of the extent of misery and horror which the country at that time presented, if peradventure it might lead his unfeeling heart to feel some salutary emotions. But we know that it quite failed of producing this effect, and instead of returning as a subdued and humbled sinner, we find him only as a wild bull in a net, an infuriated being, whose rage is turned against him that smiteth him, a man lighting against God.

But let us turn our attention to his servant Obadiah. Behold him on the solitary and deserted road, bearing the woes of Israel on his compassionate heart; meeting everywhere with desolations and miseries, which he cannot remedy! The country around him, wherever he advanced, once a fruitful field, now changed to a parched desert; and its whole appearance seemed to say, “Who can stand before thee when thou art angry?” But that which must have affected him most, and pierced his heart the most deeply, must have been the thought of apostate Israel, who could yet, as with a forehead of brass, stand insensible to the lightning of the Lord’s power, and the thunder of his judgments; for he sees them continuing to live as before, in the most unpardonable obduracy, and in the most absurd security. How must it have a afflicted him! How could he possibly refrain from holy indignation! God’s children are in this respect, as well as others, conformed to the image of their Saviour. They bear in a sense the sins of the world upon their hearts, and like him they have to become repairers of the breach which the ungodly have made; restorers of paths to dwell in,

which others have destroyed. But happy are such persons; they are numbered among those to whom the man clothed in linen, with an inkhorn at his side, was directed, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, to “go through the city of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sighed and cried for all the abominations that were done in the midst thereof.”

While Obadiah is thus on his way, absorbed in melancholy reflections, he is met by a solitary and venerable personage, girded as a traveler and covered with a mantle, whom he immediately recognizes as Elijah, and prostrates himself in profound respect before him. “Art thou that my lord Elijah?” he asks. Is it possible? Nothing having for a long time been seen or heard of him, he, with many others, might have supposed that the Lord had secretly taken him to his rest. The prophet replies briefly in his own manner, “I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.” This reply, however, was too brief for the worthy Obadiah; and, indeed, was like an arrow to his heart. He felt that he was now but a poor, weak, desponding child of man. And all the children of God must have their trying seasons of personal danger for the trial and increase of their faith. What “treasure” we have, “is in earthen vessels,” (easily broken,) “that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

This lesson Obadiah had now more perfectly to learn by the instrumentality of Elijah. And it evidently cost him considerable conflict with himself. “What have I sinned,” says he, “that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation nor kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here! And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me.”

These many words are not the language of tranquil faith, but of human fear and despondency. His imagination pictures to him dreadful forebodings; that, while he is gone to carry to Ahab Elijah’s message, the latter might he caught away by the Spirit of the Lord to some unknown region, as had happened, perhaps, heretofore to other saints of God. In the Acts of the Apostles we have such an event related concerning Philip the evangelist. Hence Obadiah apprehended Ahab’s sorest displeasure at his disappointment in losing the prophet Elijah. Ahab would consider himself mocked by Obadiah; or, at least, would be amazed that Obadiah had not secured the detention of the prophet; thus Obadiah would lose both his office and his life. Such were his fearful apprehensions. Natural however as they were, still they were only thoughts of flesh and blood. He looked, as Peter afterwards did, at the wind and the waves, but had lost sight of his Lord.

But, further. He begins to speak of his piety. “I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord’s prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here; and he shall slay me.”

“I am a pious man,” means to say, “thou must not be misled by my court dress and the office I fill; I am none of the rebellious children;’ I have continued faithful to the Lord. Canst thou find in thy heart to expose a believing brother to the most dreadful danger?”

And truly Obadiah was a pious man, notwithstanding all his weakness. Who could be offended with him for speaking of his piety, and recounting his good deeds on such an occasion? For it was neither presumption nor vainglory that led him to do so, but simply fear and dread. Here, however, let us be reminded that our salvation is built not upon works of righteousness that we have done, but upon God's mercy; not upon what we are to him but upon what he is to us. All our works of righteousness together, are but a poor foundation to rest upon.

It was salutary, then, for Obadiah, and it is salutary also for us to be thus taught by providential experience our own weakness, that we may habitually learn to build more exclusively on that only sure foundation, Jesus Christ, the foundation which alone can stand for ever. Our only refuge and consolation, in life and in death, are the blood and righteousness of the Lamb of God; and, that we may depend upon him and abide in him alone, our gracious God suffers us continually to feel, in one way or another, our sin and weakness, that our own utter inability may never be lost sight of.

Are we ready to value ourselves upon our courage? His providence unexpectedly suspends over us some danger or threatening storm, and we experience that we are but as a reed shaken with the wind. Do we feel complacency in the strength of our faith? A test of it is presently given us, and we are made conscious that we only dreamt of possessing its genuine power.

Are we rich, as we think, in pious feelings? Soon, very soon, alas! by some apparently trifling accident, do we find our whole stock of goodness exhausted; and we are obliged to confess that out of Christ's fullness alone do we receive. If we imagine that death is no terror to us, and that we shall be able to show the world how men ought to die, a slight glimpse of the king of terrors will easily dissolve our heroic courage.

Are we become spiritually proud, thinking of the high advances we have made in holiness, we are soon made to learn the truth of the case. All our boasting now is at an end, and nothing remains for us but to cry, like every other child of God, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

"If I wash myself with snow water," saith Job, "and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." And why, that we may decrease and Christ increase? The discipline, indeed, is painful to our fallen nature, but the consequences are most salutary.

"The end of the Lord" was now attained in this instance of Obadiah. Self-humiliation had been effected in him, and the light was again suffered to shine upon him. Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto Ahab to-day."

This composed the fears of his troubled heart; so Obadiah went to Ahab, and he had now sufficient boldness to tell the tyrant, "Behold, Elijah is here."

~ end of chapter 5 ~

02.06. Deliverance from the Mouth of the Lion

Deliverance from the Mouth of the Lion

CHAPTER SIX

“Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad,” was the injunction of the Lord to Laban, the Syrian, when he “ so hotly pursued after” Jacob, as if he meditated revenge. Genesis 31:24. His tongue was immediately tied, his hand bound, and his heart turned back again.

Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their protector, who “hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon, who shutteth up the sea with doors and bars, saying, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; who stilleth the raging of the sea and the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people.” A proof of this will be seen in that part of the history of our prophet which we are now about to consider.

“And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel” (1 Kings 18:17-20.

Here is:

I. The wonderful protection of the prophet.

II. The unjust accusation brought against him.

III. The bold language he uses;

IV. The secret power he exercises.

I. Obadiah had gone at Elijah’s bidding

He had sought out the king, informed him that he had met with Elijah, and that he was still continuing at the place where Obadiah had found him. Ahab accordingly, with what feelings we may better imagine than express, went to meet Elijah. Instead, however, of any of that manifestation of royal anger which is as the roaring of a lion, not a stroke falls. Not an arrow flies; nothing ensues but the feeble question, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”

Here is not even an outrageous curse or menace, as if the volcano had been suddenly exhausted and only emitted a little smoke.

Thus, the Lord our God can stop the mouths of lions and enable his people to tread on serpents and scorpions, so that nothing shall by any means hurt them when they are upon his errands.

Yes, the same God who was thus a wall of fire round about Elijah, defeating the resentment of Ahab and Jezebel; who delivered Daniel and his three companions; who released Peter from prison also, in the case of Luther, the poor Augustinian monk of Wittenberg, put to shame the power of the pope and of other numerous and mighty persecutors; the same God still liveth in the great Head of the church, Christ Jesus; and he is with his people alway, even to the end of the world; he is their succor and defence. Depend on it, Christians, you would not pass your days and nights so quietly as you do, were it not for his continual interposition against those who would molest you. The enmity of the prince of this world, and of his servants, the children of disobedience, is still unabated.

Many an arm of strength, both in the higher and lower walks of life, would be stretched out against you, but that he stays it. For as many as have their heavenly Father's name written in their foreheads, as many as profess Christ sincerely and faithfully before men, as many as will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer molestation on that very account in this present world. And that we live so peacefully and quietly "In" our dwellings, and that our lives are so safe, though in the midst of dangers, is altogether owing to the protection of our almighty Saviour, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; who never remits his vigilance over us day or night; who with his mighty angels encamps about his people, and is himself their bulwark. In eternity we shall discover, to our great astonishment, how enemies the Lord God prevented from injuring us, and from how many of the hands of men he has delivered us. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." O how safe in such a tower of refuge! Thus Elijah experienced, and thus may we.

II. As the protection which Elijah experienced was of the same kind

as that which all the servants of God are wont to experience

So, in like manner, the accusation charged upon him, as if it were he who troubled Israel, was only another characteristic of the people of God. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" said the wrathful monarch, and thus cast upon the prophet the whole blame of God's heavy judgments upon the land. But, from the beginning of the world, this crying injustice on the part of men is one of those afflictions of the cross which they are called to bear after their Lord and Redeemer. Painful as this must ever be found to flesh and blood, it is one salutary means for purifying us from the remains of indwelling sin.

It indeed often appears as if ministers were the storm-birds and messengers of misfortune; the disturbers of peace, and such as "turn the world upside down," just as Elijah seemed to be, when, at his word, the season of famine overspread Samaria. Religion enters a family, and instead of peace comes division; unanimity is banished from the circle.

A believing son or daughter may, to their great grief, excite against themselves their unbelieving parents; and a minister, in like manner, by his faithfulness, may offend the most influential of his congregation, and these may stir up a majority against him in order to get rid of him. Faithful preaching of the Gospel may sometimes be like the sinking of a burning mountain in the sea. Sleepers awake, and the dry bones are stirred.

On such occasions the thoughts of many hearts become revealed. Drunkards become sober, and the sober drunken.

O what divisions of heart may we then witness! Congregations splitting, and parties forming! Then, also, as in the apostles' time, it is always the case that the faithful and awakening preachers of the Gospel are regarded as the offending parties, "the men who have turned the world upside down;" whereas the whole blame rests with those whose hearts are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, and who "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." Nevertheless we must be content to bear the blame of being the troublers of Israel.

"The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough that the disciple be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household? Therefore fear them not; for there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed, nor secret that not be known."

Elijah was accused of troubling Israel, and certainly he was God's instrument for chastising the idolatrous and wicked kingdom. The children of God, though they are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world, and though the world overlooks or despises them, have very much to do with the turn of its affairs; they are of no small account in the sublunary disposals of Providence. How many a single potent adversary has been felled to the ground; how many a community has dwindled and decayed because of their opposition to the people of God, who are continually praying, "Thy kingdom come!" How many a blaspheming tongue has been prematurely laid silent in the grave because of that universal prayer of the church, "Hallowed be thy name!"

Yes, if our adversaries knew how many things take place in the world on our account, whether for the strengthening of our faith, for our succor, or for the crowning of our prayers-if they knew what influence "the quiet in the land" exercise, even here below, upon the fate both of individuals and whole nations; and how often it is given into their hands to open heaven or to close it-to bring blessings upon a place, or to take them away-to bind the arm of the mighty, and to bring to nought the counsels of the prudent-if they rightly understood in what sense the Prince of the Host, whose banner we follow, has made us not only priests, but also "kings unto our God" -their rage would exceed all bounds: and how would they then cry out, "Ye are they that trouble Israel!"

III. Let us now consider Elijah's answer to Ahab The prophet stands before a mortal enemy, who is the despotic ruler of the land; and how does he meet his false accusation?

- Does he excuse himself, and cry for mercy?

- Does he have recourse to flattery or artifice?

- Does he, in order to save himself, begin to "prophesy smooth things?"

- Does he conceal from him the true cause of God's judgments upon the land?

- Does he even endeavor to moderate the king's displeasure, by announcing to him the good news of approaching rain?

No; Elijah is a man only for the truth, and for such truth as the occasion calls for. His great and only concern was that the tyrant, together with his people, should judge themselves, humble themselves before the living God, and give him the glory. This was of more importance to him than his life. He knew whither he was going, and death had no terrors for him. His answer there-fore is, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the

commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Such language as this is seldom heard upon earth. The world is full of flatterers and dissemblers, and such characters abound not only in palaces, but also in ordinary society; but faithful servants of God, who are dead to self-interest, who so love their brethren as to be unwilling to suffer sin upon them-such men are rare indeed. O, Ye ministers of Christ, among high and low, let us not complain of the little fruit of our labors till we have first complained of our own too great love of pleasing men.

We should see greater things, were not the salutary and awful, "Thou art the man!" so entirely unknown amongst us. It is not enough that we deal in general truths concerning human corruption, openly acknowledged in our church confessions. How far is all this below the faith-fulness of prophets and apostles. If Elijah, or Paul, or John the Baptist were here, you would hear the trumpet give a very different sound. To how many an Ahab of the present day would it then be said, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord."

- How many a Jezebel would then be told to her face, "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

- How many a publican, "Demand no more than is thy due."

- How many a Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."

- How many a Felix, how many a Drusilla, who at present hear only smooth words, would then be forced to submit to one closet sermon after another from plain and unsparing lips, upon righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come!

You may well pray, my friends, that it may be given to your ministers to make a better use of the liberty which is thus divinely committed to them as an awful and most responsible trust, "to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine." And what is the nature of our commission? We have a heaven to promise, and a hell to threaten. We stand forth as messengers in Christ's stead, as the stewards of the mysteries of God. We speak not from ourselves, but that which One who is greater than all commands us to speak. We go forward, surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, as the ambassadors of the King of all kings, and have the right to announce our message to sinners m the name of God, with "Thus saith the Lord!"

O the dignity of our calling-the holiness of our office! O that it more thoroughly pervaded us, and that we were more like Elijah, or Nathan, or the Baptist, or the apostle Paul. And were it so, that by the unpleasant sound of truth we lost a whole squadron of worldly friends, we should soon, perhaps, find the loss made good by others collected by the Gospel trumpet from among publicans and sinners. Nay, were the measure of our trouble and reproach doubled, the fruit of our labor in God's field might be doubled likewise.

We may well humble ourselves, one and all, for our insincerity and men pleasing, in allowing ourselves to cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." This is not tenderness, though it assumes that name; it is the want of true love to our neighbor, a indulgence of our own indolence and ease. May the Lord kindle a purer flame in our souls, and give us a better love, a love which, where truth, the honor of God, and the salvation of our brethren require it, can speak and act

disinterestedly and self-denyingly; yet so, that no strange fire mingle with that which is holy, nor we ourselves, as is often the case, break to pieces, in our zeal, both tables of the law.

“I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.”

What then was the special sin which Elijah here holds up to view as the chief cause of the whole calamity? Is it the intemperance, or the covetousness, or the frivolity, or the unchaste life of Ahab, and of his father’s house? No; it is departure from God’s Word and Statutes.

O brethren! if sins of this sort be the greatest of all sins; if God has visited nations, countries, and cities with fire and sword on account of them, what must be his displeasure in these times, when infidelity is becoming the very fashion in so many circles everywhere; when the the forsaking of the statutes of the Lord, and the following of a heathenish rationalism has found its way even into the cottage and the work-shop; when the declaration, “we will not have this man to reign over us!” virtually becomes more and more general, and the very voice of Baalim is, in this sense, to be heard from many a pulpit, many a professor’s chair, and many a schoolmaster’s desk!

When true religion, the belief of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of the Lamb, is not only slighted, but even branded as fanaticism; and the true life in the Holy Spirit, the life of love to Christ, and the following of his steps, is so often declaimed against as pietism and enthusiasm!

How will it at length fare with such a generation, if we do not betimes fall down weeping before the lifted rod of the great Preserver of men! And what kind of days have we to expect, sooner or later, in a country where more than one Noah preaches the righteousness of God; where more than one Jonah calls to repentance; where more than one of Zion’s watchmen sounds the trumpet louder and louder, because he sees the sword approaching, and still but a small band is gathered of those who faithfully adhere to and take up the cross; while thousands upon thousands treat the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing, scoff at the word of the Lord, presumptuously turn with disgust from the precepts of Christ, bow the knee to any or every shameful lust, and thus virtually bring their offerings to the abominations of the Moabites and the Amorites!

What vials of wrath must at length be poured out upon this favored region! Will it have sufficed that the Lord has affected us with lack of employment and want, with stoppage of trade and business, and visited us with plague and pestilence? Will he not see it necessary to come with still severer judgments?

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee!! Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell.”

O that my people would turn from evil ways, that the Lord God might repent of this evil concerning us, and turn from the fierceness of his anger, that we perish not!

IV. Elijah, having thus faithfully deliverer his message, now begins to

make preparations for a scene which has not it’s like in sacred history The Lord God is about to show, by signs, and wonders and mighty deeds, that he is God and none else; and Baal is to be

overthrown in one day. “Now therefore,” said Elijah authoritatively, like a representative of God, “Now therefore,” O king! “Send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel’s table.”

He speaks the word and Ahab obeys, and collects the prophets unto mount Carmel. See how matters are reversed! The subject prescribes, and the king, yes, such a king, complies! “The thing is of the Lord.” The hearts of all are in his hands! The servant of God have, through faith, “out of weakness been made strong, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained the promises.” If we, as lambs are sent in the midst of wolves, yet we are clothed with a divine panoply, and often with a divine influence upon others, if we are Christ’s faithful servants.

We have not, and we need not, any carnal weapons, offensive or defensive. When despised or reviled, we must neither despise nor revile again, much less must we have recourse to the swords with which the world is wont to fight. Instead of all this, there is something else given to the servants of God. “This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.”

True faith is always accompanied by the illuminating light of the Holy Spirit, whose temples we are, and who always manifests himself as the Spirit of the mighty God. Here is a divine some-thing that can do wonders. With this something can babes and sucklings still the enemy and the avenger; and defenseless sheep have often with it disarmed their most violent persecutors.

This is the true star of honor which gleams through the clothing of humility; as it is better than all the wisdom of the wise and the cunning of the prudent, so is it of more value than all the honor of the noble, than all the power of the mighty. With it the most simple may remain steadfast against the most seductive subtleties of false philosophy, and put to shame the whole array of abused talents and learning.

This secret something, which Christians carry about with them; this unction from the Holy One, which pervades their whole being; this sign of the Son of man, and seal of the Lamb upon their foreheads, is the supernatural armor in which the servants God do exploits, carry on their conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; and, like their Saviour: “bring forth judgment unto victory.”

Yea let them beware of being exalted above measure. Our safety lies in being ever lowly at feet of Jesus; and the spirit of his precept disciples may well apply to us, “Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather: rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

All other joy, yes, even the joy at the victories we gain, tends to darken the inward eye, and remove poverty and dependence from our view. But if the prize of our high calling be continually kept before the eye of faith, its brightness will make us see our own unworthiness.

Joy in our present gifts and endowments is mutable and evanescent, for they may be wholly or in part withdrawn from us; but the joy of our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, is permanent; for we know that the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, “The Lord knoweth them that are his, and he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.”

O happy they whose names are written in the book of life, and doubly happy they who rejoice in this, above their chief joy! Amen.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

02.07. Elijah and the People at Mount Carmel

Elijah and the People at Mount Carmel

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was a remarkable but wise decision that Solomon made in an extremely difficult case which was once brought before him. Two women came to him with an infant, to which they each asserted a mother's claim; the one stating that the child of the other woman having died, she had taken hers from her before she was awake, and laid her own dead child in its place; whilst the other asserted that the contrary was the truth, saying, "The dead child is hers, and the living is mine;" they therefore besought the king to determine the matter.

But how was it to be done? The king calls for a sword, and on its being brought, he said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it."

You are aware how the king, from these expressions of the two women, settled the dispute and decided the cause (1 Kings 3:24-27).

A better compassion than that of a woman for her sucking child has God for his dear children, He, too, will have them entirely as a whole living sacrifice, or not at all. He will not consent to our being divided between himself and the world. The love he requires is that of all the heart, all the soul, all the mind, all the strength.

Such, likewise, is the Requirement of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."

We must be wholly the Lord's. Such was Elijah himself, and such he taught others to be, as we shall see by attending the portion of his history which is now to be considered.

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

"Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken" (1 Kings 18:21-24). A great and ever-memorable scene is here unfolded. The ancient controversy, whether the Lord be the one only and true God, is now to be decided by himself. The passage before us, however, shows only the preparation for this astonishing

decision.

Here we have:

I. Elijah's expostulation;

II. His challenge;

III. His confidence of faith.

I. We are to transport our thoughts to the summit of mount Carmel

Below roars the sea on one side and bounds the view; on the other, the eye stretches over the brook Kishon into the spacious plain of Esdraelon, where mount Tabor is see in the distance, and still nearer, the little town of Nazareth, while the lake of Genesaret glimmers there beyond in the blue horizon; to the north we behold the mountains of Lebanon with their cloud-caped summits. On the magnificent height of Carmel, so renowned of old for its fertility, there is at present a monastery and a Turkish mosque, beside many subterranean chapels, caverns, and grottos, appropriated to religion.

Hither, every year, on the supposed anniversary of the memorable day recorded in the text, multitudes of Mohammedans and nominal Christians assemble to pay, in common, religious homage to Elijah. How would Elijah himself deal again with these priests of Baal, if he could once more return to the ancient scene of his zeal and conflict? You are to behold him then at present on the heights of Carmel, surrounded by the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, the four hundred prophets of the groves, who ate at Jezebel's table, a lewd and profligate race, by the idolatrous king and his pompous court, and by multitudes of the poor, perishing, seduced people, awaiting, with anxious curiosity, the transactions about to transpire.

These being assembled, Elijah appears before them upon the rising ground, conspicuous to all; a plain man covered with a mantle.

He looks around him with a cheerful and undaunted countenance, while all are silent to listen to his address. He then exclaims audibly to the whole assembly, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him."

The effect of this bold and serious address was a dead silence on the part of the assembled multitude. They seem to have felt the power of his expostulation concerning their doubt and indecision. With the court and the priesthood the case was different; they were decided idolaters, who had sold themselves to work wickedness in the service of Baal. But the people, perhaps, had not been able entirely to forget what great things the Lord had done for their forefathers: they could not bring themselves to renounce entirely all allegiance to him; therefore they sought to persuade themselves that they were not idolaters in reality, but worshipers of the true God under the name of Baal, confounded the Lord God and Baal together, and invented a religion in which they gave themselves to all the lusts and abominations of heathenism, but retained the self-complacent notion that still walked in the way of their fathers; that though the form of their worship might be a little different from that of their ancestors, the substance was the same. What awful self-delusion! What pitiful double-mindedness! Such were the people to whom Elijah addressed his remonstrance.

But if Elijah were now preaching amongst ourselves, would he not still have to deliver many a severe animadversion upon halting, wavering, instability? Surely he would not long endure to witness the double-mindedness and indecision which prevails among professed Christians. Certainly we see some decided characters on the one side, and on the other-on the path of death, as well as on that of light and life-and as to the former sort, there is a decided sentence against them already pronounced in the Word of God. But will it eventually fare better with those who may be called borderers, who halt between two opinions, who practically, at least, doubt which master they shall serve? And O that the generation of these halting ones did not constitute the majority among us! But, alas! Is it not so? Decided living unto God is surely no common thing.

But what, dear brethren, is our supreme happiness? Is it not to enjoy fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ? Is not this the one thing needful? Let the Lord be your treasure; let him be your supreme love. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world;” until it can be demonstrated that these are your supreme good; that these can save and make you happy; that these can redeem and comfort you. Could they indeed do so, then the time you spend on religion would be entirely lost time. Make sure, therefore, of your choice, and be decided as to how you mean to live and die.

If human existence be confined to this present life merely, and if we have nothing beyond it to look for, then “let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!” then “walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes;” for why should we then lose time upon an imaginary thing, a nullity! But if this is not our rest; if there be a world to come, an eternity hereafter, what means our loitering upon the way, our settling down in the land of our pilgrimage? Be therefore pilgrims and strangers decidedly; lay aside every sin-everything which would impede your progress; esteem all such things as dross and dung, that ye may enter in at the strait gate, and that the word Eternity may not at last be a word of thunder to you. Surely it is well worthwhile to sacrifice all other cares to this one-of escaping eternal punishment, and becoming partakers of everlasting happiness. To act half as children of time, and half as children of eternity brings with it entire death. If the word of God be true, submit yourselves to it in all things, even in those which are ever so opposed to our corrupt nature and wayward desires. Believe it heartily, both in its promises and its threatening. But if ye are wiser than God, then show it decidedly; only do not halt, for that is irrational and absurd, and do not mix light and darkness together.

Neither attempt to compromise between God and the world. If Christianity be of God, decide for it with body and soul; embrace the cross; be willing to suffer affliction with the despised people of God; forsake the pomps, pleasures and vanities of the world, and employ all your endeavors to promote the kingdom and glory of Christ. Do not waver between the righteousness of Christ, and your own. Which of the two will avail you in the judgment?

If it be only the righteousness of Christ, then value yourselves no longer on your own supposed virtues, as many do, with whom we cannot belong in company without hearing of the good works they have done and are doing, both of humanity and religion. Neither be undecided as to the choice of your friends and associates; for “he that is not with me,” saith Christ, “is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattered.”

And the Holy Ghost, by his apostle, saith, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with

darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall he my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

"And the people," it is said, "answered Elijah not a word;" they perceived, no doubt, that his remonstrance was well founded, and his expostulation just. And does not our remonstrance, made to you upon it, commend itself to your consciences?

II. Whether the Lord be God, or Baal be God,

rests not now with Elijah to determine The Lord God himself will answer that question. Elijah proceeds, "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men!"

God be thanked that he was not the only man of God then living in Israel; he, however, was the only one at that time who stood up among them publicly to maintain the Lord's cause against his adversaries; the rest were either slain, or banished, or concealed in dens and caves of the earth.

Imagine, then, Elijah's situation at this time. Among the whole concourse at Carmel he knew not a single brother in the land except Obadiah; not one besides who was likeminded with himself, not one who made common cause with him, or kept him in countenance. Think what it must be for a man thus to stand alone in the midst of a host of strangers. What an overwhelming power is there in the sight of such a multitude of opponents to abash and discourage! But our prophet blooms in this moral desert like the rose; yea, he flames like a meteor in the troubled sky. The peace of God is within him; his heart is at ease; he breathes freely; his tongue does not falter. He is cheerfully bold to testify the name of the Lord his God before this untractable and deluded multitude because he is truly zealous only for the honor of God and simply devoted to that one thing.

We, my brethren, should not be so easily daunted and confounded in our confession of Christ before men, were we simply and unreservedly devoted to him, and not secretly concerned also for our own credit and reputation. But, alas, we have too little love to the God of our life, to the God of all grace, who hath "called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus." Were we but wholly given up to the simplicity of love, we should prove invincible; for "many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

"Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men." You are aware, brethren, how much there is in the feeling of being overpowered by numbers, to inject the doubt, "Am I, then, the only person in the right, and all these in the wrong?" How easily are we thus induced to make the gate of the kingdom of heaven somewhat wider, and the narrow way somewhat broader; to give up this or that particular portion of the truth, and not to be so very precise and exact in the cause of the Gospel.

But Elijah was clearly above the influence and operation of circumstances like these. He was sure of the justice of his cause, and though the whole world had thought differently from himself, he had no mind to compromise, or to give place-no, not for an hour; and why? Because he able to say, "I know in whom I have believed." He was an experimental believer, whose faith was interwoven with

his existence arid happiness.

“Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.” As if he would say, “This maketh no matter to me; no, nor even though they were as many thousands; for we shall soon decide the point with them.” He had faith to behold more engaged for him than all that could be against him.

III. The people at mount Carmel are all on the full stretch of expectation,

while Elijah addresses them upon the preparations to be made,

and the purpose to be answered by them

“Let them therefore give us,” he added, “two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.”

They agreed to the proposal; some from curiosity, to see what would happen; others, in the hope that Baal would gain the victory; but some few, perhaps, from a real desire to be certain whether the Lord was the true God. What a hazardous proposal this appears on the part of Elijah! He ventured the whole credit of the Lord’s worship upon the issue of it. But he acted really at no hazard; he was assured that his gracious God would not leave nor forsake him.

The world had already received more than one answer by fire; so that it ought not to have required another: but one more such answer still awaits this evil world; “the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up” (2 Peter 3:10).

- God answered by fire when the first transgressions when cherubim and a flaming sword were planted at gate of Paradise.

- God answered Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, and the shores of the Dead Sea retain the traces of it at this day.

- By a fiery vision God confirmed his promises to Abraham, when a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between the pieces of the sacrifice.

- From the of fire in the bush God spake unto Moses; and of the fire, clouds, and thick darkness, he spake to Israel on mount Sinai.

- By fire he answered transgression of Nadab and Abihu, the two elder sons of Aaron, who in their priestly capacity offered strange fire unto the Lord; for “there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”

- By fire as well as earthquake God answered Israel in the matter of Korah; for “there came out a fire from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.”

- By fire God answered Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple; for the fire came down and the glory of the Lord filled the house (2 Chronicles 7:2-3).

- God likewise answered the waiting apostles at Pentecost, by cloven tongues as of fire.

“And the God that answereth by fire, let him be God.”

Let us spiritually apply this to ourselves. The fire of the Holy Spirit is the witness of God in every true believer. This fire consumes the dross of his corruptions, and warms, cheers, and enlightens his soul. He that is insensible to the testimony of this witness, is still dead in trespasses and sins.

Let us show then that our hearts burn within us, by the spirit of our life and conversation before God and man.

May the Lord Jesus inscribe his name on our hearts in the flaming letters of his love, that he may not see it necessary to write it in our ashes in the eternally glowing characters of his just displeasure. For he will answer and declare his name to the adversaries, by the fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels; in order that every creature, either with the voice of rejoicing or in the language of self-condemnation, may give him the glory. The Lord, he is God, and his name endureth forever. Amen!

~ end of chapter 7 ~

02.08. The Decision at Mount Carmel

The Decision at Mount Carmel

CHAPTER EIGHT

“To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” So spake the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, to the thousands of Israel; Psalms 95:7-8; and again, by the apostle, to the Christian church; Hebrews 3:15; and let us, dear brethren, seriously lay these words to heart.

What is this hardening of the heart? It is having minds unconcerned about God’s testimonies; it is allowing ourselves to live in practical unbelief. Judicial hardness arises from resisting one divine and gracious call after another, and overcoming one holy influence after another, through unbelief. The more favored we are with means and ordinances, the more danger there is of becoming hardened. The greatest numbers of hardened, as well as of converted persons, are generally found under the most faithful preaching of the Gospel.

There are those among us who do not cleave with full purpose of heart unto the Lord. They have already succeeded in resisting many a gracious call which was made to them, and in again shaking off many a conviction which had fastened on them. O that the demonstration of the Spirit and of power may be now vouchsafed unto us that we may become as surely convinced that the Lord is our God, as the Israelites at Carmel, whose further circumstances we are now about to consider, were convinced, by the answer of fire from heaven, that “The Lord, he is the God!”

“And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

“And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.

“And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

“And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD: and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it

the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

“Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there” (1 Kings 18:25-40).

What are our reflections after reading this wonderful narrative of sacred history? Is not the answer of the Lord powerful and full of majesty? Yes, the voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness. May we really feel its power and majesty! Here we see, I. How poor a god is that of the ignorant and infatuated world!

Elijah had made his proposal; both parties were to sacrifice a bullock, and each was to call on the name of his God. “God,” said Elijah, “that answereth by fire, let him be God.” And all the people agreed to it. “It is well spoken,” cried they, as with one voices; and thus the important moment was now come, which should once for all decide whether there be a God in heaven, and who he was. Elijah lost no time. He said unto the prophets of Baal, “Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first, for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods.”

He gives them the precedency on account of numbers; “ye are many,” you have the majority on “your side. Yes, my brethren, this has always been the case in the present evil world, that the majority have taken the wrong side; and they so outnumber the little flock of Christ on earth, that they could, as it were, swallow them up, if the safety of the latter depended on their numbers. “Ye are many!” Yes, indeed, numerous as weeds of an uncultivated field; vessels of wrath every where; all Israel, except seven thousand, a remnant only preserved; all the rest in Samaria, and her towns and villages alienated from the life of God.

And is it not just the same in many Christian countries at present? True it is, in this world they have the upper hand, and not without reason, for the prince of this world is their monarch. Hence they are honored and looked up to, and we are the offscouring of the people; they are the great and the wise, and we the fools. They are the party that have the judgment of the public in their favor, and the voice of the greatest geniuses, and of the most brilliant talents, and the applause of the public journals-and we! ah, if any one takes our part, he thinks he is doing a most condescending work of benevolence.

We stand as a sort of criminals before the great public, and have no advocate but Him who was in the form of a servant, and who, instead of defending our cause before the world, tells us that “his kingdom is not of this world,” and bids us look to the future for our consolation. What wonder is it that we appear utterly wretched and ridiculous to the world, when the very Judge, to whom we appeal, is one whom they have, long ago crucified. Well, be it so, ye sons and daughters of the

father of lies! Be the first, and have the superiority-for ye are many. The Lord is at hand!

But to return to the narrative, the priests of Baal make preparation for the sacrifice. This they were obliged to do on account of the people. Probably they would rather have let it alone. If they taught the people to worship Baal against their own better knowledge, how wretched must they now have felt while they cut up and dressed their bullock! So that they would have been glad to be themselves placed in the victim's stead to escape the inexpressible shame and disgrace which they were now bringing upon themselves. But such a season of the most horrible confusion in the face of their own congregations, shall eventually seize upon all hypocritical and lying priests, however they may now deceive and mislead the people at their altars or from their pulpits. The sacrifice, being prepared, they begin to cry aloud, "O Baal! hear us!" and when one of them is hoarse and exhausted, another begins and cries, "O Baal! hear us!" and if his faith fail him, a third rallies his drooping spirits and shrieks out, "O Baal! hear us!"

One fixes his eyes on the clouds; a second looks down into the depths to see whether the longed-for flame will not burst forth; and another hearkens intently to hear it rumble in the ground beneath him. But though they wait with desponding countenances, from morning until noon, and from noon until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, it is all in vain, the cry of their frenzy dies in the echoes of the mountains. "There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded."

There lies the sacrifice on Baal's altar, still unconsumed! At last they begin to be desperate, and to act like mad men. They leap upon the sacrifice, as if to provoke Baal to anger, and to call forth fire from him in consequence of it. Or else the meaning is, that they perform a frantic religious dance about the altar, after the manner of Baal's orgies. Be this as it may, there is no notice preternaturally signified of it either in heaven or on earth.

A miserable deity indeed-a mere nonentity was their idol itself; for "an idol is nothing in world."

And does the favorite deity of this enlightened age deserve any better name?

Is the god of the Bible-hating and froward generation of the present day-is the god of most of our philosophers and poets, of our politicians and journalists-is the god of very many of our seminaries and universities, professors and students-is the god of our modern scientific institutions-is the god of our polished circles and of our fashionable assemblies in which it is regarded as disreputable to have even the appearance of adhering to the God of the Bible-is such a god any better, anything more real than the deity of Baal of old? What mean those fashionable expressions which we hear every where substituted for the name of God, the revealed Lord? I mean the expressions "heaven," "fortune," and such like. How came these expressions to be so in use, except as a flimsy veil to hide the aversion men have to the name and the Word of God? How do they hate to hear of anything like divine communication and manifestation of answers to prayer, of Divine influence on the heart, or communion with God, of experience of his presence-these are mere fabulous and absurd notions to them-these they esteem as mere delusion-proof enough that, with their god, there is neither voice, nor answer, nor attention-proof enough that what they call heaven, and fortune, and fate, denotes a mere nonentity.

And is this indeed the God of our rationalists, and so many of our literary men and illuminated dreamers! It is; and the belief of no better a god than this spreads from them; through all ranks;

and no marvel; for a god such us this, that cannot concern himself about the affairs of men, of course will suffer a thousand sins and excesses to take place without being offended; and this is the very thing they want: that the service of the flesh may be a thing allowed; that falsehood, deceit, and flattery may stand as commendable prudence, and the most voluptuous dance be regarded as an innocent amusement; they wish for a god to whom it is indifferent what a man thinks and believes-a god by whose name any one may, with impunity, swear falsely; a god in whose presence a man need not be ashamed of any loose discourse, nor blush at any impure lust.

Behold, such is the god of this perverse generation! I speak not of all but of the majority. Such is their universal father, as they would gladly conceive him to be: yes this conceited, Bible-hating, and falsely rational generation! Woe unto them; for what will they the end thereof, in that day when their fear cometh, when distress and anguish cometh upon them? Then their cry will be no better than that of “Beal, hear us!” and such will their pretended prayers to God be found to have been all their life long. For the god whom they now profess to serve is no God but only an imagination of their own. For true is that which the Holy Ghost saith by the apostle John, “He that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 1:9). Tremble then at this word of the Lord, all ye who have not the God of the Bible, who have not God in Christ, for ye are “without hope, and without God in the world;” ye are practical atheists.

But to return to Carmel. There is no end, at present, to the outcry and idolatrous poise. Elijah stands by and surveys the tumult. How must his heart have been ready to break with compassion; yet what a holy indignation must he have felt within him! Then, again, how foolish and ludicrous must the scene have appeared! “And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said,

“Cry aloud; forasmuch as he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.”

Perhaps he has his head and his hands so full, that he neither hears nor sees you. Perhaps he is engaged in meditating some undertaking, or arranging the thunder and lightning; or else he is not at home, but engaged in the chase; or perhaps he has laid himself down a little, and is asleep; cry aloud, and awake him!

Yes, just as there are doubts which must be expelled, not by reasons and arguments, but as one of the primitive fathers says, peremptorily with such an expression as “fie, fie,” which we should use to children; and just as there are cares which are best removed by a smile, so there are absurdities and errors to which a little well-timed irony is the best reply.

Where reasons no longer avail, and where proofs are no longer acknowledged, such irony may occasionally serve a useful purpose. Something like it is met with in Isaiah 44:1-28; and there, also, it is leveled at the sottishness of idolatry.

What can be done with obstinate, self-conceited people, who, perhaps, do not once give themselves the trouble to read the Gospel and examine it? Why should we contend long with such about the truth, seeing that all men have not faith; nor is it communicable, like an article of merchandise. Perhaps it is better to advise such persons to “stay at Jericho till their beards are grown;” and to say no more. Human nature in the obstinate, ignorant and self-conceited, is sometimes more caught hold of by brevity like this, than by ever so long and serious an address. Are you disposed to blame Elijah for being able to mock and use irony during such a momentous

scene? If so, you are wrong. He discovers here a free and unruffled state of mind; an inward confidence and cheerfulness about the truth and justice of his cause; a certainty of success, and that the true and living God will not forsake him. If there had been the smallest doubt, the least uncertainty in his soul, he would certainly have indulged no disposition to irony.

But what is the effect of it upon Baal's prophets and votaries? It excites their vexation and impatience to the highest degree. Baal must hear now-he must come forth, whether he will or no. Their cry to Baal is now intense; they draw out their knives and lancets and lacerate their bodies, according to heathen custom, until they stream with blood; as if they had still retained some remnant of the ancient maxim, that "without shedding of blood there is no remission."

With their sinful blood they think to induce Baal to hear and answer them; and then they begin to prophesy-that is, to make all kinds of enthusiastic motions, and to rave and mutter forth horrible incantations. But there was no voice, nor any that answered, nor any that regarded-all was in vain.

And even with the living God himself, my brethren, such excitements of spirit, and forced ecstasies and devotions are not the way to gain an answer to our prayers. However much you may excite yourselves, the Lord has no pleasure in such sacrifices. Mere solemnity of countenance, bowing down our bodies, praying ourselves hoarse, spending whole hours in mere will-worship, are not the things to propitiate God: and as long as you think so, you receive no answer from him.

III. This unavailing cry of the idolaters was continued from

the morning until the time of the evening sacrifice

Then Elijah stood forth in simplicity and uprightness, without pomp and show, with a tranquil countenance and a firm deportment; so that everyone might well presume that he was a prophet of the true God. "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him," both priests and people: the former in utter dismay, the latter in eager expectation.

On the top of Carmel lay the ruins of an altar, here called the altar of the Lord. It had probably been built there in better times, and had been thrown down by the idolaters. This altar Elijah now repaired; as if he meant to say, "May God restore thee, O Israel! May God restore thee, thou mournfully dilapidated sanctuary of the Lord!" For what Elijah now did had a significant meaning. He took twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes of Israel, in order to rebuild with them the altar in the name of the Lord. This was figuratively to say, God will perform his promise to Jacob, and will keep his covenant with him whom he surnamed by the name of Israel."

About the altar Elijah cast a trench-and then prepared the wood, dressed the bullock, and laid it upon it. And might not he who afterwards spoke of Christ's decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem, now have sighed "'O that thou wouldest soon prepare thy sacrifice, thou Priest of God, that offering which perfects for ever them that are sanctified!" He commanded that water should be poured on the wood, and on the sacrifice, in order that the miracle might be the more unquestionable, and no one be able to object, as if fire had been secretly applied, "Fill four barrels with water," said he, "and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. And the water ran about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water."

The preparations are now completed. A secret awe thrills through the assembled multitude: deep silence prevails. “And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice (which with us about three o’clock in the afternoon, a solemn and important hour, the ninth hour, as it is called in the evangelists) that Elijah the prophet came (near to the altar) and said, Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that, people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again!”

Elijah calls God by his name, Lord God, which he had given himself in the beginning, to denote his condescending and compassionate love to fallen man; he calls him “the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel,” that he might excite in the hearts of this backslidden people a bumbling remembrance of all the good which the Lord had shown to them and to their fathers from ancient times, by his own grace.

Elijah prays, “Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at by word.”

The honor of God is his supreme desire. He would also have his own mission confirmed in the eyes of the people, and he added, “Hear me, O Lord, hear me;” expressive of the fervency and earnestness of his spirit, “that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.”

The glory of God and the salvation of the people- these two things formed the entire object of all that the prophet did and said. And what shall we admire the most in this prayer-the prophet’s zeal for God’s glory, or the ardor of his love for the degraded house of Israel-his astonishing boldness in asking such great things, or his firm confidence in not doubting that God would testify to his own cause? No: we wonder most at the unspeakable grace of God, which teaches a handful of dust and ashes, as man is, thus to believe, love, and pray, to him be the glory.

And now, what ensues? Mysterious moment! The whole revelation of God is at stake. If no answer follows, the whole fabric falls in, and the ground of our hope is gone. Then all that Elijah has testified-all that the prophets have spoken before him, and which Elijah has confirmed-will be accounted a delusion; and the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Israel will be no longer regarded! The prayer is uttered. The silence of death reigns in the assembly-every heart beats high- in every face is the extreme of expectation; when lo! The answer comes; the Amen is given; the fire of heaven descends, in the sight of every one, directly upon the altar, consumes the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth, and licks up the water in the trench. “And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, the Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.” Elijah’s faith is crowned, the foolish priests are put to shame, and all the gods, which are not the God of the Bible, are confounded and annihilated.

Ah, what has not the merciful God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Israel performed, to bring us to the knowledge of himself, and to faith in him! Has he not spoken to us without end, in nature and in the Scriptures; by creation, providence, and revelation; by arguments and figures; by prophets, apostles, and ministers; by signs and wonders of every kind, in the most intelligible manner, condescending to our weak capacities, as a most merciful Father; and yet, how few are there that really know him! how few give him glory!

O ye untoward and perverse generation of this world, come near-come near! Behold not only the testimony by which the Lord answered Elijah upon Carmel, but likewise all the testimonies in which the Lord has made himself known.

We will place some of them before you, so that you may once more see and remember them. He has given living testimonies of himself, by thousands; and that which he gave in these last days, when he spake unto us by his Son, was not the last. Look at the altar of his church built upon himself as pillar and basis, and on the twelve living stones of the apostles. Look at the sanctuary of God, its ability, its age, its extent, where the life and light of the Holy Spirit, that fire of the Lord, never goes out day or night; is not this spiritual temple an abiding proof that the Lord liveth?

Look at every stone of this building- every converted sinner.

- Here was also a ruined altar; but see, it is restored:

- Here was also a surrounding trench of thousandfold sins, ensnarements, connections, and obstacles, which closed the entrance against the Lord; but lo! His fire has penetrated.

- Here were also stones-a hard heart and an unteachable mind;

- Here was also wood and earth- deadness, carnality, and darkness; But the flame of the Lord has consumed the earth, the wood, and the stone, and dried up the floods of ungodliness; and the desolated ruin is become a memorial of the glory of God.

Yet how few believe our report; and to how few is the arm of the Lord thus revealed in the present day! Nevertheless, whether men believe it or not, they shall be surrounded with the testimonies of Israel as with a wall, so that only two things will remain to them-either to cry, “The Lord, he is the God!” or, as real children of Belial, to declare that they will have nothing to do with the Lord. It will thus at least come to a decision. Whosoever this day returns home from mount Carmel, without caring to have it said in his heart, “The Lord, he is the God!” let him hesitate no longer to take his place in the ranks of those who are of their father the devil, the god of this world, who blindeth the eyes of them that believe not.

The people on mount Carmel gave glory to the God of Israel; but the priests having hardened their hearts from his fear, and remaining still prophets of Baal, were therefore ripe for destruction. And Elijah said unto the people, “Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” The people are ready enough to do it; for they perceive the abominable deception which these destroyers of souls had practiced upon them. They fall upon them, drag them down, at Elijah’s command, to the brook Kishon, and assist the man of God in destroying them. However painful this execution must have been to the tender and compassionate heart of the prophet, and how many thousand times soever he would have preferred being God’s instrument of these men’s conversion rather than of their destruction, yet, because the honor of God demanded it, he could deny his human feelings, and be obedient, notwithstanding natural tenderness and gracious compassion. I say, obedient; for in the law of God, given by Moses, Deuteronomy 13:6; Deuteronomy 13:9, it is expressly said, “If any one will entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.”

This express command of the Lord, the prophet was obliged unhesitatingly to obey, however much his feelings might rise against it; for he was appointed of God to contend zealously for the law, to reestablish the statutes of the Lord in Israel, and to restore the tables of mount Sinai to their ancient honor. And it is not fit that a servant of the Lord should in such a case confer with flesh and blood. “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth,” is the language the obedient spirit.

Christ has introduced another dispensation under the New Testament; and the summary punishments of the Old Testament have been exchanged for longsuffering. Hence the righteous and the wicked grow on together until the harvest; but were the same mode of procedure adopted now as in the days of Moses and Elijah, there would be no end of the slaughter; so numerous are the votaries of Baal, even in the midst of a church which is called protestant and evangelical.

But the Woe pronounced against them “will surely come, it will not tarry” beyond “the appointed time.” He from Bozrah, traveling in the greatness of his strength, who is red in his apparel, will come, in his holy providence, and put in motion the winepress of his wrath. His glittering sword is bathed in heaven, he hath bent his bow and made it ready for the overthrow and destruction of all seducers.

Go on, ye hirelings and grievous wolves, in your thousand places of concourse, and persuade your poor flocks to sacrifice unto other gods than Him whom Abraham called his Lord, and whose goings wore heard on the mountains of Israel. Go on, ye corrupters of youth, ye blind leaders of the blind, and, amidst the plaudits of the ignorant and ungodly, despise the sovereignty of the Ancient of days, that may imagine on his throne a being of your own defining, that ye may dream the Almighty to be such a one as yourselves. Go on, ye people of rank and fashion, and proudly sneer at the true incarnate Jehovah of the Bible, and pay your worship to the wisdom of the day!

Alas! The angel is already flying through the midst of heaven, and crying, “Woe! Woe! Woe! To the inhabitants of the earth!” The sword is already drawn to slay you, the pile of Tophet ordained of old is already erected, on which forsaken by your imaginary gods, you will become flaming monuments forever of the divine justice, and of all holy vengeance.

Oh, it is fearful indeed to fall into the hands of the living God; for he is a consuming fire. I beseech you, lay it to heart; he is a jealous God and a consuming fire!

But thou, Israel, take the harp, rejoice and be glad; thy God liveth! Carmel and Golgotha, heaven and earth, vie with each other in showing forth, “Thy God liveth!” Join in the song, O Israel! and cry aloud as with the voice of a trumpet, laying one hand on thy heart and lifting up the other on high, “My Lord, he is the God!” the everlasting King! This shall be known in all the earth! Amen.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

02.09. The Prayer on Mount Carmel

The Prayer on Mount Carmel

CHAPTER NINE

We have already had three remarkable instances, in Elijah's history, of the efficacy of the fervent prayer of the righteous man.

- First, "he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and months."

- Secondly, he prayed for the restoration of the widow's son, and the child was restored to life.

- Thirdly, he prayed for the answer by fire to consume the sacrifice, and to decide the controversy with Baal and his priests.

And now we have him praying again, and the heaven gives rain, and the land once more brings forth her fruit. Let us here learn the blessing of walking with God, and conversing with the Keeper of Israel by continual prayer.

"And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. (1 Kings 18:41-46). The fire has borne its testimony; the waters now speak. In how many and various ways does our gracious God testify of himself, that he is the living God of providence. This, also, is done in answer to the Prayer of Elijah. Here is,

I. The preparation for prayer;

II. The prayer itself;

III. The answer to it.

We are to imagine ourselves at the foot of Mount Carmel, in the plain below, where the prophets of Baal were slain. Those idolatrous priests have fallen by the hand of Elijah and his new followers, and their blood is mingled with the brook Kishon; and praise redounds to God, who is holy in all his ways, and who is glorified by the overthrow of his enemies, as well as by the hallelujahs of his friends.

Three years and a half had the heavens been shut up from yielding a drop of water to the thirsty land of Israel. What an appearance must the face of the country now have presented! All vegetation parched and burnt up; man and beast reduced to skeletons, and all flesh faded like the grass. They who had now become believers in God must have been filled with unusual terror. They had attained to the knowledge of him amidst the thunders of his judgments; he had appeared as in flames of fire.

Even for the sake of these poor trembling sheep, our prophet was heartily desirous that his Lord and God should again show his goodness and lovingkindness. He longed earnestly, that for the glory of God and the people's good the brazen skies should now dissolve in abundance of rain, and the season of famine and distress terminate. For this purpose it was necessary that Elijah should speak to God. The prayer of faith was to him what the staff was to Moses, with which he divided the Red Sea and struck water from the flinty rock.

Ahab appears to have remained with the people by the brook Kishon, and to have witnessed everything, even the slaying of his priests-not without a partial assent, for Ahab was evidently a weak capricious tyrant, destitute of character, and governed and molded by present circumstances. The miracle on Carmel, and the enthusiastic cry of the people, "The Lord, he is the God!" had not left his heart unmoved, but made a momentary impression; so that he might have even thought at the time, "Be it so, that the Lord is God!" But his heart was not changed; no true faith had taken possession of it. Many a one may have impressions from what is taking place around him, so as to be moved by them for a time; but he soon recovers his former state of mind, and goes on afterwards just as if nothing had happened. Such was the case with Ahab and others, at the fiery testimony on Carmel.

Elijah, about to retire for prayer, wished to be relieved from the company of Ahab and his attendants, and he said unto him, "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain."

In these words we cannot help discerning a bitter reproof given to the wretched monarch. It looks as if he had said, "Thy carnal ease is thy principal care; now take it; it will not much longer be disturbed by drought and famine." It was also a cutting reproof, as implying that the king's presence was not wanted; especially while Elijah was about to converse with his God. And does it not convey a touching reproof to any of us, if the children of God are obliged to become mute and monosyllabic on our entering their company, and immediately turn the discourse upon the weather, politics, or the news of the day? Is it not a Divine admonition to us, when we cannot help feeling that we are burdensome to them, that we interrupt them, and when it is gently hinted to us that we do not perhaps feel ourselves quite at home, that we are rather out of our element?

Yes, to be thus sent away from Christian society, and banished as it were from the sanctuary of God, is surely a foretaste of future judgments. And how many amongst you must daily swallow the bitter pill of being told, in one way or another, "Get thee up, eat and drink;" "we should be glad to be without you; we cannot go on comfortably while you are present."

"Get thee up," said Elijah; and added "for there is a sound of abundance of rain;" a sound of a rustling, as is usual before an approaching storm, in the tops of the trees and upon the waters. Whether he heard it only in faith, with the ear of the spirit, or whether God rendered his bodily

hearing so acute that he really heard it from afar in the elements, or in the higher regions of the air, we need not inquire. It is enough that he heard it, and it sounded to him like the tolling of the bell of prayer, even as a forerunning Amen to the aspirations for which he was preparing himself; and it strengthened him in the hope that his will, in desiring rain, was one with the will of God, who would now send rain.

My brethren, we sometimes hear such a sound also; and whenever we hear it, let it be to us what it was to Elijah-a summon to prayer. It ought to be so to us, according to God's intention. When, at any time, the preaching of the truth is blessed to a church, and the word reaches the soul- when a movement appears in a congregation, and a general excitement prevails-when tears of emotion flow, and people meet together and say. "What a powerful, impressive sermon!" there is then a rustling, and it is then time, ye children of God, to lift up your hands and pray, that after the sound, the rain may come.

Again, when some judgment has occurred in the neighborhood; when a barren fig-tree has been unexpectedly cut down before our eyes; when a scorner has been evidently smitten by Providence, that the simple may beware; or whatever it be, when the whole neighborhood is alarmed, and unbelievers themselves are obliged to confess that the hand of God is visible- then pray that it may not stop there.

When you are informed that one individual is desiring the sincere milk of the Gospel, and that another has risen up from the seat of the scornful, and shows an inclination to come amongst the people of God; when you perceive that among the members of your household there is an inquiry after eternal things, and that your children begin to hear gladly of the Lord Jesus; then, then the sound reaches your ears; then it is time to lift up your heart in prayer.

Yes: be watchful, ye children of God! never fall asleep on the walls of Zion, keep your ears attentive, and listen in every direction-in the church and in your houses, among your friends and relatives; and when you hear the rustling, even if but faintly and as at a distance, go immediately to your closet, fall down at God's footstool, stretch out your hands and cry, "O Lord, We will not let thee go, unless thou pour upon us the gracious rain of thine inheritance."

And the same course should be pursued when there begins to be a rustling, not merely amongst others, but in your ownselves; when it thunders and lightens in your own darkness; when a word strikes you, and a ray of light comes into your soul; when the glory of Christ is more clearly manifested to your mind, and your soul enjoys a foretaste of his grace, then give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure. The rustling is not the rain itself; but it is the forerunner of the rain, an vine summons to prayer. O, regard it as such!

While Elijah was thus employed, Ahab, we are told, went up "to eat and to drink." Miserable man! after all the great and heart-affecting scenes of the day, he felt just as if he had witnessed an interesting, though somewhat tedious comedy, after which refreshment is welcome, and food is relished. Would that such characters were not too common even at present! Many among us are not a whit better than Ahab. But a fearful woe awaits those who suffer the most powerful testimonies, the loudest calls to repentance, and the most affecting works of God to pass before them like a shadow or a dream. They please themselves with such things for a while, as with a "pleasant song" or beautiful painting; but carry nothing away with them from our churches and

meetings, except perhaps a feeling of the length of the service, or some topic for conversational display, together with a good appetite for the next carnal meal. Yes, this is all; though perhaps in the morning the Lord by his Spirit has answered as with fire before their eyes and ears. However, we will not detain them; let them “go, eat, and drink!”

II. When Ahab was gone, Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; in spirit,

however, we find him descending into the valley of humiliation On Carmel’s summit, where all was calm and still, as in a solitary closet, no unbidden guests followed him; there he could converse uninterruptedly with the Lord. On the top of Carmel, too, he could the sooner perceive if his prayer was heard; and he stood there, on a lofty watch-tower, from whence he could widely survey both sea and land. However, he does not seem to have made much use of this commanding view; for, on reaching the summit, he kneels down, closes his eyes, bends his head forwards towards his knees, and in this posture he begins to address the Lord, and to pray for rain.

Behold him! Would it be supposed that this is the man who, a short time before, stood upon Carmel as a vicegerent of God, seemingly empowered with a command over the elements? Yet be now humbles himself in the dust, under the feeling of his own poverty and weakness. What does his whole demeanor express but abasement and consciousness of his littleness and unworthiness! But it was the will of God that we should for once behold his great prophet in such a situation, and overhear him in his closet, in order to teach us where his strength really lay; to show us that it has been God’s rule, from ancient times, to work with weak instruments, and to do wonders by bruised reeds, in order that we might see whence even an Elijah derived his greatness; and not be tempted to place the honor and glory upon the head of man, instead of laying it at the feet of him to whom it belongs; and that we might feel the force of that encouraging sentence of the apostle James, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are.”

When Elijah stood before the people, he was God’s ambassador, and as such, had to speak and to act in virtue of his high commission; but when he stood before God, he was a poor sinner and a worm, who was only able to live by mercy, and had nothing to demand, but was obliged to beg everything at the throne of grace.

On the summit of Carmel the feeling of his unworthiness seems to have quite overwhelmed him. How could it be otherwise, when he looked back upon the events of that day, and upon the whole course of his life to that moment!

What success had been granted him, in the fulfillment of his desires and prayers. What succor, what preservation, what answers had he experienced! And who was he? He will have it confessed before God and men, how unworthy he is of the least of all these mercies; how willing he is regard himself as the chief of sinners. And in this consciousness he appears before the Lord, entreating again a new wonder, although the altar is still smoking from the fiery testimony which the Lord at his request had so recently given.

When Elijah had wrestled awhile with God in the depth of self-abasement and poverty of spirit, in a manner which perhaps few of us know from experience-for all believers do not tread in a path of such a deep and thorough humiliation-he said unto his servant, “Go up now,” that is, to the declivity of the mountain, “and look towards the sea!”

He placed him, as it were, on the watchtower, to look out and inform him when his prayer was beginning to be answered by a sign of rain becoming visible in the distant horizon. For, he was certain of a favorable answer, in faith on the word and truth of Him who had said to him at Zarephath, “Go, show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth!”

The servant went, looked out in the distance, and cast his eyes about on all sides; but the sky was as clear as crystal-not a cloud to be seen. He came back, and said, “I see nothing.” But it is a matter of daily experience, that help does not appear at the first cry, nor is the harvest reaped the moment after the sowing time of prayer. This is certainly not agreeable to flesh and blood; but, spiritually considered, it is very salutary.

What would be the consequence, if God’s treasures were always open to us at our first knocking?

- Should we not then seem to be rulers and commanders in the city of God, and forget our dependent condition?

- Should we not be in danger of making an idol of our prayer, as the Israelites made of the brazen serpent, and think it is our prayer that effects all:

- Should we not think that in prayer we possess a secret charm, a divine rod, or a legal claim upon the bounty of God?

We should soon become self-sufficient.

Therefore our gracious God does not always appear to hearken to the first cry, but lets us generally stand awhile at the door, so that once and again we are obliged to say, “I see nothing.”

We ought then to reflect a little, and become deeply conscious that we have, in reality, nothing to claim, but that all is mere unmerited favor. If we make our first approach to his footstool in the character of just persons, he keeps us back until we feel that we are poor sinners, unworthy petitioners; and are ready to say, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” Such is his method.

“There is nothing,” said the servant. But our praying Elijah does not despair.

The reason why we generally so easily grow weary, and so soon cease from praying, is because we are not sufficiently in earnest for the blessing we implore. This, however, was not the case with Elijah. He therefore bids the servant to “Go again seven times.” But why precisely seven times? Does it me several times, or is there here any particular emphasis in the number of seven? And why was the servant thus to go again and again? What would it avail him to hear every time, “There is nothing” O, it stimulated the prophet’s ardor-it animated him to wrestle the more earnestly with God-it made him still less and less in his own eyes, and drew forth deeper and deeper sighs from his contrite soul.

How would his fervor in prayer thus augment from one minute to another! To obtain a speedy hearing is much more agreeable to our natural feelings, but waiting long is far more beneficial for us. Those are the most blessed spots on the face of the earth where prayer is wont to be made with the greatest fervency and perseverance.

During this process of persevering prayer:

- Our corrupt nature receives the most painful and deadly blows;

- The heart is then most thoroughly broken up, and prepared for the good seed of the Word;

- The remains of self-love are then demolished the most effectually;

- The chambers of imagery are then the most properly cleansed;

- The foundation truth in the soul is laid deep.

And when the answer comes at length, how great is the joy!

III. The servant returns the seventh time, and says, “Behold, there

ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand”

Elijah’s prayer is answered!

It is true, it is only a little cloud at first-hardly visible. But, when God gives the first fruits, he gives the harvest in due time. If thou hast received a little grace, rejoice! Thou hast hereby a pledge that thou shalt receive more! If there be something of his Spirit in thee, know that abundance of grace is in reserve for thee. Forgiveness is a pledge of adoption, and renewal of spirit commenced will be carried on, through faith, unto the day of Christ. Therefore let every sincere Christian rejoice, who sees in himself or in others a little cloud of divine grace. Let him but continue instant in prayer, and the blessing shall increase abundantly.

And the prophet said unto his servant, “Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.”

Thus was literally fulfilled what Elijah had said: “There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” Therefore the Lord did not let the full shower come all at once-but, first of all, a little cloud that was scarcely visible, that Elijah might have time to announce the approaching rain to the king, that the rain might come at the word of the prophet; and that it might be fully apparent that the Lord God of Elijah, was the Governor of the world.

The servant comes to the king, who perhaps was stationed in a pavilion upon the mountain, whilst the sky is still clear and seems to promise anything but rain. “Prepare thy chariot,” was the message; “get thee down, that the rain stop thee not!” “Rain!” would the astonished guests exclaim; “Rain!” would the people cry, full of joyful hope; and scarcely had they lifted up their eyes, when every region of the sky seemed to reply, “Yea, and amen; an abundance of rain!”

Dark thunderclouds ascend out of the sea, one after the other; the heavens become black, the wind sets all the sea in motion, roars through the forests, and a violent storm pours down upon the land, O welcome streams! refreshing floods! The face of the earth is renewed, and all nature rejoices. A breath of life breathes over the fields, wood and meadow are clothed with new verdure, the birds resume their music in the branches, and man, and beast and everything seems as if resuscitated, The voice of rejoicing is heard in the dwellings of the righteous, and joy fills the hearts of the godly.

Ahab is already seated in his chariot, and on his way to his royal seat in Jezreel. But “the hand of the Lord was upon Elijah.”

The Lord God invigorated him with supernatural bodily powers, so that the prophet, girding up his loins, ran before Ahab's chariot, which doubtless was at full speed, on account of the deluging rain. The prophet was now a living memorial to the king, to remind him the great things which the God of Israel had brought to pass by his prophet; that Ahab might not easily forget them, but carry the fresh impression of them to Jezebel.

Elijah therefore outran the chariot before his eyes, through all the torrents of rain and tempest, till he came to the entrance of Jezreel.

* * * * * The apostle James, as we have before noticed, adduces this instance of Elijah's success in prayer as an encouragement to us to persevere in prayer, and to believe that we also shall not fail of being answered, if we only pray in faith; because, "The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). And indeed, who can recount all the wondrous instances in which the truth of this declaration has been realized!

- Through prayer, Moses turned away the fierce wrath of the Almighty from Israel;

- with outstretched arms he smote the host of Amalek; and Manoah,

- by the voice of his cry, Manoah drew down a visible manifestation of the Divine presence in human form (Judges 13:8).

- Through prayer at Mizpeh, the prophet Samuel smote the army of the Philistines, and caused the thunder of terror to roll over Israel's foes (1 Samuel 7:9-12).

- Through prayer, Josiah the prince died in peace (2 Kings 22:19-20).

- Through prayer, fifteen years were added to Hezekiah's life;

- The three men were preserved in the burning fiery furnace;

- To Daniel it was said by Gabriel, "I am come because of thy words."

- At the prayer of the brethren on the day of Pentecost, the heavens were opened;

- After they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and all were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:31).

- Prayer burst the fetters of Peter, and broke open the doors of his prison.

- Prayer rebuked storms, healed the sick, and brought back the dead to life.

And what shall I say more of the power, the wonders, and the performances of prayer-the whole Scripture is full of them. And our church also would be full of them-all Christendom would be full of them, were there more prayer in our Israel, and more of this incense on our public, family, and private altar.

But prayer sleeps amongst us; for what we call praying, morning and evening, according to custom-the sleepy, dull, and heartless repetition of devotional language-does not deserve the name of Prayer. Keep those ceremonious compliments to yourselves; the Lord does not want such service. The confessions of the broken and contrite, the cry of the humble, the expression of real godly sorrow, the opening of our cares to our heavenly Father, the breathings of grateful love,

the acknowledgment of dependence on the name of Jesus-these are the things which go to constitute true prayer.

Brethren, pray that the Spirit of grace and supplication may be poured out upon you; and then ask what you will, it shall be done for you. He that “cannot lie” has promised it. Only ask in his name, as the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus, trusting in God’s faithfulness to his promises, and you will certainly succeed at last.

If six times, the answer should be, “There is nothing;” yet wait on. The seventh time, which is the proper and the Lord’s time, will give the answer you need. Too often we omit to notice God’s answer to own prayers, otherwise how often should we find, to our glad astonishment, that, at the time of our supplication, the commandment had gone forth to help us.

Therefore let the call to prayer be ever regarded by us as the invitation to an unspeakable privilege. “Continue instant in prayer” Pray in the Spirit, in the Holy Ghost, and not in your own self-sufficiency, and you will pray with power.

Pray for yourselves, pray for all, and pray with faith and expectation for in the immutable word, that word which must survive both heaven and earth, it stands recorded, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23). Amen.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

02.10. Flight Into the Wilderness

Flight Into the Wilderness

CHAPTER TEN

“He that cometh from heaven is above all,” was the testimony of John the Baptist to the Messiah: and the course of our Lord’s ministry confirmed this testimony. Wherever we see the Saviour appearing and acting, in the narrative of the Gospels, the impression irresistibly forces itself upon us: “Here is one greater than Moses and all the prophets and apostles-here is one, who is separate from sinners, and above every creature- one, who came down for a short time to our world, as into a strange country; but whose peculiar residence is on the throne of glory and majesty.”

We are convinced that no mere man could have acted as he did, however divinely commissioned. Miracles as great as his were wrought by the apostles and prophets; but the manner in which they were wrought by him, and by them, exhibits an immense distinction between the one and the other. They, with all their derived powers, showed themselves to be but men . Christ evidently acted by his own independent power and authority: he raised the dead, cast out devils, healed the sick, controlled the elements, fed the assembled multitudes with a few loaves; all by his own inherent will, without any appearance of that dependence which constituted the very strength of his servants who wrought miracles in his name.

His very prayers were expressions of his will; and we see him on every occasion as the Holy One of God, entirely distinct from all created beings. Yes, he is above all: and, great as was the prophet Elijah, his infirmities serve to remind us how infinitely inferior everyone is to the all-perfect Prophet, Priest, and King, our Lord Jesus Christ.

“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

“Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:1-4). The man of God is again called away from public activity and reformation, and his path loses itself once more in the solitudes of a wilderness. What now befell him served for spiritual exercise to himself. The torch is shaken, that it may afterwards glow the brighter, and the refiner of Israel must himself undergo additional trial and purification.

We have here to notice,

I. Elijah’s persecution;

II. His flight;

III. His dejection.

I. Our imagination can picture Ahab now arrived at his palace at Jezreel,

which appears to have been his summer residence,

on account of its agreeable situation.

We are certain that Jezebel, his queen, could not have been indifferent as to the issue of the great contest at Carmel; and we may well suppose that she was expecting, with impatience, the return of the king.

We have seen that he returned at full speed, in a violent rain; and it is easy to imagine him hastily alighting from his chariot before the palace, and hurrying into the apartments of his imperious consort, to announce to her the wonderful occurrences he had just witnessed.

Elijah meanwhile remains in the neighborhood, awaiting the issue of the great events which had been brought to pass. His hopes were probably at this time raised high; perhaps he even promised himself an immediate return, both of prince and of people, to the God of their fathers.

Ahab, full of the tidings of these strange events, “told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.”

We can imagine with what emotions he would enter her apartment, and say,

“The Tishbite has triumphed! Fire from heaven has confirmed his word. Upon his prayer, with my own eyes I have seen flames fall from the skies, consume the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and lick up the water in the trench. All the people can bear witness to it. They fell on their faces, and cried out, as with one voice, that the Lord is God. The priests of Baal were slain; Elijah and the people have destroyed them, and their blood is flowing in the brook Kishon. They were laughed at as liars and impotent deceivers. Their authority and their worship is gone forever. There is universal enthusiasm for Elijah. He is a prophet of the living God. The miracle on Carmel has placed it beyond a doubt, and these heavy rains completely confirm it. At his command they fall; he closed heaven, and he has now opened it again.” In some such manner as this we may suppose the king communicating the tidings to Jezebel and then breaking off in the midst of his narrative, as if he had been thunderstruck. On what account? Alas, he sees the features of his queen gather blackness like a storm.

The weak king, as one “whom Jezebel his wife stirred up,” for thus the sacred historian speaks of him, is evidently completely under her influence; and when he perceives the effect his narrative has upon her, his opinion is quite changed; he begins to take another view of the wonders at Carmel, as also of Elijah himself. Jezebel resolves to gratify her blood-thirsty revenge, and she is the adored mistress of Ahab’s affections.

The deluded monarch appears not to have dared to think differently from Jezebel his wife. He appears as a lamentable instance of one who, though not totally insensible to the voice of truth, continues a wretched slave to the father of lies. His heart was given to Jezebel, and her affection is the price to which everything else was to be sacrificed. On her behavior to him was all the

happiness of his life suspended. He was the sport of her tempers, and she exercised over him the most unlimited control. Pliant, like clay on the potter's wheel, and capable of taking any form, he was always ready to be what she was pleased to make of him. Sold by affection, under her influence he soon lost the last remains of manly steadfastness; and, before he was aware, his own individuality was so much sunk in that of his own proud and imperious mistress, that he heard only her ears, saw with her eyes, and felt and thought only with her. A great many persons, in every age, are thus led blindfold by human influence. The claims with which the prince of darkness binds mankind to his yoke and banner, are not always the grosser vices and lusts: he secures thousands of souls to himself and to hell, by attaching them with the silken cords of a tender affection to persons who have taken a decided part with the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Now, whatever the bond may be, whether paternal, filial, conjugal, or social, the effect is the same. The influential person or persons rule with irresistible power, and the poor captive soul thinks not for itself, has no firmness or independence; friends and party govern it altogether, and this in spite of the most distressing convictions. Nor is it by perverted human affection alone that men are kept back from the truth. There are others, and not a few, who are equally far from the kingdom of God, by reason of the homage they pay to human intellect, either in themselves or others.

The corrective of all these different sorts of error would be a heartfelt belief of those plainest declarations of the Gospel:

- "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

- "He that cometh from heaven is above all" (John 3:31).

- "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12.

- "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

And you who exercise influence over others, take heed that you prove not, in this respect, the agents of the great enemy of souls; for if through you any "weak brother perish," "his blood will be required at your hands." Remember, that whoso destroyeth a soul, "Him will God destroy."

Woe, then, unto those men of talent and acquirements, who, with revolting ingratitude, transmute the gifts and abilities which God has vouchsafed to them, into weapons of darkness; who, under the influence of the great deceiver, assault the most sacred things of God.

Woe unto those much admired rulers of literature, who, in wicked self-deification, use the power they possess over the minds of men, to rivet more firmly the bonds of infidelity and hostility to Christ upon the neck of the present generation; and who exert their genius in preparing those intoxicating notions and antichristian systems which delude themselves and others to their destruction.

Woe unto those brilliant heads in laurel crowns, that cover the kingdom of sin with fantastic enchantments, and overturning every sacred restraint, implant the horrible delusion in the mind, that he sinneth not who only contrives to sin poetically and elegantly.

Woe to those whose voices give the tone to the world, who have sufficient means for becoming the Ezras and Nehemiahs of their time, but who are a pestilence to the age they live in, by darting forth their wit in seductive and blasphemous falsehoods; and abuse the weak understandings of those who hang in admiration upon their lips, in order imperceptibly, under the pretence of superior light, to scatter sparks of rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed.

Woe, woe unto these betrayers of mankind! Their part will soon be acted. A time is coming, when, from their very lips that now satiate them with their plaudits, only the dreadful thunder of furious execrations will meet their ears; and when the very hands which now crown them with laurel, will be extended towards heaven against them, to draw down upon them the lightning of an eternal curse. Be not deceived! mistake not the present course of things for the final decision.

That decision will be pronounced by Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who weighs with other scales than those of the deluded world, which only pays homage to external glitter. Your glory has its season and its period, like the flower of the grass. “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Peter 1:24).

But to return to Jezebel. The fire of hell is kindled within her; James 3:6; she thirsts to avenge the blood of the priests of Baal. In her judgment, better would it have been that the whole nation had perished with hunger and drought, than that such a triumph should have been prepared for the prophet and his God. The showers of blessing that now returned to soften the clods of the field, cannot soften her obdurate spirit.

Well would it for the world if no such characters still remained in it: but consider, my brethren, in how many Peaces the triumph of the Gospel increases the opposition of unbelievers. What scoffing and ridicule at the outpouring of the Spirit; and what contempt of piety and conversion to God are vented by many their writings and discourse! The voice of Jezebel is virtually regarded by many as the voice of truth; and this in our accredited journals in our refined circles and assemblies, in our poetry and philosophy, nay, in the chairs even of divinity professors, and in many, very man pulpits. But Woe unto the spirit of Jezebel age!

That Woe has been pronounced Christ himself, and is recorded in the last book of the sacred volume. “Behold, I will cast that woman Jezebel into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, and I will kill her children with death” (Revelation 2:22-23). This is their end.

Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, has now sworn by her gods that Elijah shall die. But the Lord, who can bind the unicorn with his band, and can put a hook in the jaws of the leviathan, will now interpose to preserve Elijah. “He who taketh the wise in their own craftiness,” and “infatuates the counsel of princes,” has only to leave Jezebel to the madness of her own evil passions, and, lo! she so imprudently forgets herself, as to send and apprise the prophet of her murderous intention against him. This was, of course, the very defeat it. “Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time!”

Elijah hears the message. What means it? Does it mean indeed that all his labors and conflicts are to issue in his own disappointment and death? Is this the conversion of Jezebel, and Ahab, and of Israel, which he had hoped for? Alas, what a bitter draught for the soul of this man of God! Who

shall comfort him at this lamentable turn of affairs? Certainly he had never received a more painful stroke upon his spirit than this and if his faith steers clear amid such rocks without shipwreck, it must be owing to the support and guidance of an Almighty hand.

But does the Lord take any pleasure in frustrating our hopes, and leading us to despondency and doubt? O no; far be it from him! “He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him.” The hopes he raises in us he will fulfill; only we must not think to prescribe to him the time or the manner in which he shall do it. He will never suffer his servants really to “spend their strength for nought and in vain.”

When therefore they seem to be frustrated for a time, it is only that they may learn that their success is not “of him that willeth nor of him that runneth.” He finishes all his works and crowns them all, but he does it in his own “mysterious way.” He suffers discouragements and impediments to arise, that his wisdom and power may be hereby the more manifest, and that the creature may learn that “this is the Lord’s doing.” Nothing, therefore, which we engage in for his glory, shall be eventually unsuccessful; but then “the Lord alone must be exalted.”

Behold, my friends, such are the ways of God! Set then your minds at rest respecting all present difficulties; only keep in the way of duty, and commit yourselves to God. He will be able, at the proper time, to solve every difficulty. Reserve your judgment for the final issue, and remember that “the beauty of a thing,” as a primitive father observes, “appears at the moment its maturity, which God waits for.

He that tastes the blossom instead of the fruit, will pass a wrong judgment upon it. He that would limit his idea of the beauties of vegetation to their appearance in the winter season, would judge very blindly.” Yet how often do we conclude thus hastily as to the ends of God’s providential government and disposal of human affairs!

II. Let us now follow Elijah in his proceedings upon receiving this alarming message

“When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah!”

In this instance, Elijah’s faith appears in some measure to have failed him. The very words of the sacred narrative seem to give us a significant hint respecting his state of mind just then. For the words are, “When he saw that.” What did Elijah see? Not God’s promises, aid, power, and faithfulness; these at least only dawned upon him in the background, with broken and feeble rays. But in the foreground very different things did he see: namely, the infuriated Jezebel threatening his life, and all the horrors of a cruel death. Instead of soaring above these as on eagle’s wings, and looking down upon them with sublime composure as on former occasions, the pressure of human terror seems to have been too strong for his mind, especially as backed by the disappointment of his public spirit on Israel’s account.

So “he arose and went for his life:” or, as others have paraphrased it, “he arose and went whither he would;” which serves further to intimate the obscurity of his course and the uncertainty of his steps. He had at this time no express divine direction as to whither he should go. Hitherto his way had always been marked out for him most distinctly by his Lord; but not so now. There was no particular divine word to serve him for a staff on this journey; no distinct commission, Remove

hither or thither; do this or that! shining before him like a lamp, giving wings to his feet and firmness to his steps.

He went forth into the wide world in uncertainty, distracted by doubts, and unaccompanied by the consoling consciousness that he was taking this road for God; since he went it only for himself, and for the sake of his own life; and verily this thought was not much calculated to relieve his oppressed mind.

How pleasant and comfortable is it to pursue those paths, however rough and thorny, in which we feel assured the Lord has commanded us to walk! How joyfully is everything undertaken, begun, and accomplished, that comes to our heart by a Divine commission! We then run, and are not weary; we walk, and are not faint. But to have put to sea without knowing if we had not better have remained at home-how painful is the thought!

The mind of the prophet appears to have been in this painful state, when, perplexed about the ways of God, and grievously disappointed at present appearances, he left Jezreel without any consciousness of the Lord's direction. The strange circumstance that the queen had thus imprudently disclosed to him her murderous intentions, might indeed have led him to conclude that the Lord thus warned him to flee for his life; but this was only a human inference, and no clear divine declaration.

But though the Lord may thus permit us, like Elijah, to go whither we will, without giving us any plain intimation by his providence, yet this is only a procedure of his wise and tender love. For hereby we come the better to learn what a blessed thing it is to know we are in the service of our God, and to walk at all times in the light of his guidance; like Israel, resting at his word, and at his Word striking their tents and advancing.

And the more we learn to appreciate this happy state by experience of its contrary, the easier to us is the petition, "Thy will be done!" and the more earnestly shall we hearken to what the Lord God will say concerning us, and ask beforehand his counsel and direction in everything. Again, though God's children seem to go "whither they will," in uncertainty and doubt whether the Lord is pleased with them or not, still their faithful God accompanies them as before, even while he often keeps himself long concealed. He never leaves them, but he leads them, though by secret guidance, always to a happy end. This Elijah experienced. The Lord was with him on the way, however little the prophet was conscious of it. Let us only have patience, and before we are aware, the clouds will pass away, and it will be seen, as in the case of Elijah, that we have not gone in every respect whither we would, but that God has all along been leading us.

After Elijah had traveled for many days, and gone through a great part of Samaria and the whole of the land of Judea, he came at length to Beersheba as it were by chance; for he had as little to do at Beersheba as at any other place. Here, however, he could not remain; his spirit was too afflicted for common society. Even the company of his faithful servant was burdensome to him. What could the servant do for him? He could not enlighten the darkness of his afflicted spirit, nor explain the mysterious providence which had disquieted it. Therefore, leaving him at Beersheba, he went alone into the solitary wilderness, into the very heart of it, a whole day's journey, until the sun went down. He then threw himself upon the heath under a juniper tree, and sank down under the load of his melancholy thoughts.

III. Thick darkness hung over the prophet's soul. This is shown by his whole conduct. His close reserve, his desire for solitude, his planless wandering into the gloomy wilderness, all indicate a discouraged and dejected state of mind. Perplexed with regard to his vocation-nay, even with respect to God and his government-his soul lies in the midst of a thousand doubts and distressing thoughts. It seems tossed on a sea of troubles, without bottom or shore; and there appears but one step between him and utter despair.

There he sits, like an exile in the midst of the fearful solitude, as if cast out by God and the world; with his eyes fixed; full of gloomy and painful thoughts, in spirit, he is in the land of Israel, and in the midst of idolaters, the children of better forefathers. Oh the melancholy images which pass before him! the heart-rending scenes which are portrayed upon the tablet of his memory! He sees the people reeling on mount Carmel in their idolatrous orgies; in Samaria one idol temple rises up before him after another; the streets of Jezreel resound with blasphemies against the living God and his servants; and Jezebel is drunk with the blood of the few believers who fell as victims to her revenge. Such are the images which vividly and dreadfully present themselves to his mind. And wherever he turns his eyes amidst the horrible scene is no herald of God-no voice of a single prophet is lifted up against it. Perhaps now he thinks, "Why did I not remain? Why did I flee and forsake my poor people?" And if the distress of his spirit had not been already excited to the utmost, surely such thoughts as these must have tended to that effect.

The pious servant of God has had enough of this vale of tears. He is heartily weary of painful conflicts and fruitless labors; his soul longs for its rest. "It is enough!" sighs he to heaven, his eyes glistening with tears.

"It is now enough, O Lord! Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Ah! who could have thought that Elijah could ever have become so weak and fainthearted-the man who seemed invincible in the armor of his faith, and superior to every storm! But to us it is consoling that even such an one as Elijah sat under the juniper tree, and thought in his despondency that he was unable any longer to bear the burden of life. "It is enough, O Lord! Why should I remain longer in this land of travail; My existence is useless. If my labors in Israel, in the midst of so many signs and wonders, have missed their aim, where shall they be of any service! It is enough! Why should I remain here any longer to witness the decline of thy kingdom? Therefore take me now, O Lord, my poor and troubled soul from me; for I am not better than my fathers. Certainly I hoped to see what many kings and prophets have desired to see; but I too have been disappointed. But who am I, that I should venture to desire such great things at thy hand; who am I that with presumptuous hope could promise myself a preference, for which saints, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, have longed in vain? It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life!"

Thus spoke Elijah, distressingly excited in mind. It was from a strange mixture of feelings that his prayer arose. His soul was not in a state of harmony; and yet, in the midst of the discord, the sweetest tones arose which could be breathed from a human soul. His prayer was not like the peaceful and cheerful language of Simeon, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!" nor like that clear, considerate, and calm expression of Paul, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ!" But yet it was not the same as that of Jeremiah, "Cursed be the day in which I was born!" nor as that of Job, "Let that day perish; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it!"

Elijah's state of mind was more subdued, gentle, and therefore not so wretched as theirs. The discordant groans of vexation at fruitless labor and disappointed hopes, certainly sound too audible through his sighs; but at the same time his words breathe an affectionate sorrow for the poor people, and a holy grief at the apparent decline of the kingdom of God. It must be confessed that there is something in his prayer that looks like a complaint against the Lord himself; but we perceive, at the same time, that tears of regret are already pouring out to quench it in his heart, and that the very moment when the complaint escapes him he feels the sinfulness of it, and on this very account is filled with grief.

It cannot be denied, that in the expression, "It is enough!" we behold the anguish of a soul which, disappointed in its fairest expectations, seems to despair of God and weary of the world, and is impatient and weary of the cross; a soul which, like Jonah, is dissatisfied with the dealings of the Almighty; and by desiring death, seeks, as it were, to give him to understand that it is come to such an extremity that nothing is left but the melancholy wish to escape by death, from its suffering. Nevertheless a divine and believing longing accompanied even this carnal excitement in the soul of Elijah, which, thirsting after God, struck its pinions upwards to the eternal light; yes, the keynote of this mournful lamentation was the filial thought that the heart of his Father in heaven would be moved towards him, that his merciful God would again shine forth upon his darkness, and comfort the soul of his servant.

Thus we see, in the prayer of our prophet, the elements of the natural life and of the spiritual life fermenting together in strange intermixture. The sparks of nature and of grace, mutually opposing each other, blaze up together in one flame. The metal is in a furnace, the heat of which brings to light much impurity; but who does not forget the scum and the dross at the sight of the fine gold?

"Lord, it is enough!" Ah, this little prayer is known also amongst us! How many a workshop, how many a chamber and bed of sorrow do I know, from whence this aspiration is almost incessantly ascending to heaven, in the midst of many tears and pangs!

- Many of these supplicants are mistaken, just as Elijah was. It is not enough yet.

- Many a faithful laborer has yet to learn that his labor is by no means in vain in the Lord, although he thinks it is.

- Many a righteous one shall yet see light arise here below, which, contrary to the express promises of God, he thinks is forever extinguished.

- Many a broken instrument will the Lord use again for his work, before he takes it away into the land of rest.

- Many a troubled sufferer, before he departs, shall again take his harp from the willows, and sing thanksgivings to Him whose counsel is wonderful and his ways mysterious, but who doeth all things well.

And then it will indeed be "enough." Ah, who is warranted yet in saying, "It is enough!" It is only enough when the Lord saith it. And if you have still to remain for years in the furnace of affliction, be assured that you will eventually acknowledge, with joyful acclamations in heaven, that then only was it enough, and not a moment earlier, when the Lord stripped you of the garments of your pilgrimage and took you unto himself.

One word more. If at any time you feel disposed again to say, “It is enough,” and that you can bear the burden of life no longer, do as Elijah did, flee into the silence of solitude, and sit under-not the juniper tree-but under that tree whereon the incarnate Son of God was made a curse for you. Here your soul will assuredly find sweet refreshment; yes, from Christ’s acceptable offering to God. He is a hiding-place from the storm, a covert from the tempest, a shadow from the heat, as rivers water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Whether it be true or not which is related of the juniper tree, that no serpent ventures near it, we can say this in a better sense of that “tree of life” under which we encourage you to take refuge. Here the viper of discontent will not fasten upon you, nor the “old serpent” inject the poison of murmuring against your soul.

At the sight of the cross, you will no longer think of complaining of the greatness of your sufferings; for here you behold sufferings, in comparison with which yours must be accounted a light affliction, which is but for a moment: here the righteous One suffers for you-the just for the unjust. In the view of the cross, you will soon forget your distresses; for the love of God in Christ Jesus to you, a poor sinner, will absorb all you thoughts.

Under the cross, you are prevented from supposing that some strange thing is happening unto you; “the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord;” and as the kingdom has been bestowed upon the Head, so will it also be upon the members.

At the foot of the cross you are preserved from impatience; for you cannot but rejoice exceedingly that what you are enduring is only a temporal suffering, and not the curse which fell so dreadfully upon your Surety.

At the foot of the cross, your grief will soon be lost in that joy and peace of God which drops from this tree of life into the ground of your heart, and the foretaste you will here obtain of heaven will sweeten the troubles of this life as with the breath of the morning, and before you are aware, will bring over you, as over Elijah, the feeling of a heavenly repose; yea, the cross itself will be transformed into such a medium between heaven and earth, that the most comforting: thoughts shall descend into your soul, and the most grateful thoughts shall ascend from your soul to heaven, like those angels of God seen in a vision on the plains of Bethel by the solitary and benighted patriarch Jacob.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

02.11. Visit Under the Juniper Tree

Visit Under the Juniper Tree

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Jerusalem is the city of the great king,” saith the Lord, Matthew 5:35. Where is Jerusalem? Where tears of mourning after God start into the eye; where the knee and the heart are bowed at the throne of grace; where the hands of faith are lifted to the cross, and lips of sincerity utter their prayers and praise-there is Jerusalem.

This is the lovely city of God, on whose towering heights the banner of the cross waves; this is the joy of the whole earth, and this alone of cities. There is nothing beautiful, nothing noble, and nothing worthy of regard but Jerusalem. Who would like to dwell in the wilderness of this world, if Jerusalem with its peaceful tabernacles did not stand in the midst of it? What is it makes this life of banishment tolerable, yea delightful? It is Jerusalem.

Jerusalem! O it is good to be within thy walls, to sit together as fellow-citizens according to the Privilege of the new birth; to sing together in the days of the Lord, that great is the glory of the Lord in the midst of us; to speak often one with another upon faith’s bright prospects that lie before us, to number up our joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not, or to place ourselves at the windows toward the east, and breathe the morning air of the everlasting day, and refreshing ourselves with thoughts of the blissful futurity that awaits us. “O Jerusalem, if I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning!”

- Where are the treasures of God displayed, and the jewels of heaven exhibited?

- Where burn the torches of eternal light, and where springs up the fountain of peace and joy which is inexhaustible?

- Where does the soul look into the opened books of life?

- Where does the true Israelite obtain the oil of joy from the flinty rocks?

- Where drops the balm which heals every wound?

Where, but in Jerusalem? They shall prosper that love, O Jerusalem! They shall go on from strength to strength who set their heart upon the ways Zion!

But if all this is true of the spiritual Jerusalem on earth, what shall I say of the Jerusalem which is above, which lies on the other side of the river of death, where the everlasting palm trees grow, and the still waters flow from the eternal hills, and angels sing to their golden harps among the trees of paradise.

Thither we are journeying, we happy pilgrims, from Jerusalem to Jerusalem: whilst ye who love the world, and the things that are in world, are on your way to Tophet, to the vails destruction, to

everlasting night, we are going to full and cheerful day, and on our staff is inscribed “The citizenship of heaven.” And if we sometimes appear to you as those that dream, and you see our eyes glistening with tears whilst looking at the far blue distance, it is because of our longing for home. And all you can say is, “They are weeping after Jerusalem!”

And who has built us the city, and who has made it so beautiful for us? Jerusalem is the city of the great King. “This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell!” saith he. He dwells there, and the city rests peacefully under the wings of his love. We are traveling to Jerusalem.

“And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God” (1 Kings 19:5-8). This narrative belongs to the children of God, especially to the afflicted among them. The Lord’s faithful care over his servants, especially in the season of clouds and darkness, is here displayed the most heart-refreshing manner. This Divine and gracious protection is made apparent, I. In the answer to prayer, which the prophet receives;

II. In the appearance of an angel, whom the Lord sends him;

III. In the miraculous refreshments, of which he partakes;

IV. In the delightful prospect which God opens before him;

V. In the supernatural strength given him for his journey through the desert.

Let us devoutly meditate on these delightful manifestations of the paternal love of our God.

I. Elijah had wished for death, after being obliged to give up

the hope of the regeneration of his beloved Israel

Life had now no longer any attractions for him. The love of life can bear up under the privation of many earthly endearments but it cannot survive hope. When Elijah sees this flower fading, he sinks, aria is weary of his existence. And if he had not been a man of God-who knows into what still more dreadful abyss than that of impatience and despondency he might have fallen!

It appeared as if the Lord had suddenly given up his work, and his prophet with it. The divine superintendence was concealed too deeply in the disguise of second causes for a mortal eye to penetrate through it. Nay, it seemed to have been withdrawn and to have left room for human vicissitudes-at least it seemed so to the prophet. He was unable, in such an unexpected turn of affairs, to discover the intentions of God. He found himself, as it were, in a dark labyrinth, without any candle of the Lord to shine upon his faith, or any clue to conduct him through it.

And if we consider how such situations of the godly are always taken advantage of by the powers of darkness, and how the tempter doubtless assaulted the fugitive under the juniper tree with the fiery darts of distressing doubts and horrible suggestions, we can easily comprehend how even such a champion as Elijah could thus despond; and, in the deepest dejection and anguish of soul,

cry to heaven, and say, “Lord, it is enough! Take now my life from me, for I am not better than my fathers!”

Such prayers, however, which ascend towards heaven more in the wild bursts of carnal passion than in the sacred fire of divine love, and which are not borne upwards to God upon the wings of faith and hope, but upon the gusts of natural excitement-such prayers the Lord is not wont to answer; yet he does hear, so merciful is he, the breathings of the pious soul, ascending through all this clamor of carnal feeling, and in spite of it.

Experience shows, that he is not willing to let his children finish their course in vexation and sadness. However violently the storms may rage around that spiritual life which is in them, he suffers it not to be swallowed up and drowned in the commotion. Their sky generally becomes serene again before they reach the harbor-if not temporally, yet spiritually.

Listen, ye wounded and sorrowful souls! Your hour of removal will not arrive till the Lord has first reconciled you to his providential government and gracious discipline, and compelled you cheerfully to acknowledge that “He doeth all things well!” A calm will succeed the storms and tempests of your life, although it may not be till the evening of your pilgrimage; and you shall be enabled to say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!”

Yea, you shall become willing to bear, even still longer, the cross after him, if it be the Lord’s pleasure. Your course will terminate-not tumultuously-no, but in the cheerful serenity of a sabbatical dawn, and in the midst of a radiance, beaming from the heavenly Zion, will your Divine Friend translate you to the joy of the eternal hills, that his guidance may be extolled not only above, but even here below, and his grace and faithfulness be glorified in the sight of your surviving brethren, and of an ungodly world. This sabbatical morning had not yet dawned upon Elijah. It was now one of the darkest moments of his life, in which he seemed like a man who had fallen out both with God and with the world. The request which, in time of weakness and gloomy despondency, he had ventured to prefer before God, was denied him. His life was not taken from him. He must yet live to see glorious things and learn again to praise the faithfulness of Him whose promises are Yea and Amen; he must yet be brought to feel humbled and astonished at his former doubts and anxieties; to find the most pleasing solution of every apparent difficulty and contradiction in God’s dealings with him, and to be placed in such a sunshine of Divine favor as he had never before enjoyed. And then would be the time to say, “It is enough;” and the hour would come, when-not under a solitary tree in the dreary wilderness-no, but in splendid triumph, on a highway, he should be carried directly over the dark valley into the land of everlasting rest.

O that we were not so impatient when gracious God occasionally denies our requests!

How kind it is, with respect to our real and best interests that the Lord gives us according to his will, and not according to our own; and that he condescends graciously to guard us against the attainment of our poor and often foolish wishes! We may rest assured, that whenever we pray without success that which we desire is not only not best for us but is either injurious, or at least inferior to what he really intends for us.

- How many a minister would never have experienced the Lord’s faithfulness crowning the labors of his servants, had he been called away from this life at the time when, gloomy despondency, he desired it!

- How many a Christian pilgrim would never have seen anything of the spiritual manna, and of the spiritual streams from the rocks, had God listened to him when, with fear and trembling, he besought him not to lead him into a desert!

- How many a brother would this day be unable to rejoice that the power of Christ has so rested upon him, if the thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan, had been removed at the time he entreated such relief with many cries and tears!

Take courage, therefore, my brethren! Believe that the denial which the Lord occasionally puts upon our requests will eventually yield us as abundant cause for praise, as the assent with which he at other times graciously crowns them.

Do not think the time too long which you have to wait. You may be ready to exclaim, “O Lord, make an end; it is enough!” But no, beloved brethren! You must first travel, like Elijah, through a desert unto Horeb, that you may there hear the “still small voice” of peace. There must first come things which shall compel us to exclaim, “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face!” And after that, the end; then the Pilgrim’s staff is dropped-and the longed for “now” of good old Simeon is arrived, and we are “‘tabled to sing, Thou needest, Lord, no more, To turn me o’er and o’er: The clay at length has rest, Thine image is impress’d.

Elijah did not die-his hour was not yet come. Thus his petition remained unanswered, yet not entirely so. The prophet longed for rest. Rest he was to have, not however by the stroke of death, but by the boon of natural sleep. He lay down and slept under the juniper tree. It was indifferent to him where he lay-whether on a silken couch or upon the heath-under a thorn-bush or in a royal pavilion.

The burden of life was alleviated, the juniper tree lent him its refreshing shade, the inward tempest of his soul subsided, grief and uneasiness departed, tormenting thoughts gave place to sweet and spiritual rest, body and mind became completely renovated. Such intervals of rest from labor fall to the lot of all that bear the cross. Even in the midst of the desert our gracious God is able to provide for us a place of repose; the storm does not rage incessantly; the peaceful hours intervene unawares, and the burden upon our shoulders becomes for a while a resting pillow to our heads, upon which we insensibly gather recruited strength.

At one time the Keeper of Israel sends us bodily slumber in the midst of our sorrows; and what a welcome guest may it not prove to us, particularly when spiritual conflicts threaten to confuse the senses and absorb the spirits! At another, pleasant dreams perform to us the ministry of angels; poor Lazarus is in thought translated into Abraham’s bosom, and lonely Jacob is borne aloft from his stone pillow into the opened heavens. At another season, a sympathizing Jonathan visits me in my outcast condition; and, by his affectionate conversation, imperceptibly removes my depression. At other times, some consoling truth of revelation is by a text or hymn suggested to my mind, and hope diffuses its mild and cheering light in the midst of my darkness.

In short, the very days of storm and tempest have their hours of repose and mercy, heretofore let no one be anxious, however steep and thorny his path, however dreary and rough his road. When his weary knees are ready to sink, God will know how to provide him a resting place, and he shall be able to say, “I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me.”

And although these may be only short pauses, still they remind us how easily he could, if he pleased, at any moment deliver us out of every trouble. And a believing assurance of this is sufficient to overcome every anxiety and fear.

II. The man of God lay and slept under the jumper tree To all outward appearance he was as one forsaken, and, like the disciples in Gethsemane, “sleeping for sorrow.” Yet a Divine watch is kept over him. Grace, mercy, and peace are with him. Here we have a sensible demonstration given of the ministry of the elect angels about them that fear God, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. An angel “touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat.”

Here is one instance, among several which are given in the Holy Scriptures, of the pleasure enjoyed by angels in ministering to God’s saints on earth. Behold then, in this gloomy wilderness, the ministry of an angel of God, who finds an addition to his happiness in preparing help and refreshment for a servant of God in his distress and sorrow. O Israel, a people saved by the Lord, what people is like unto you in this world, wherever ye are scattered and dispersed, or in whatever age ye live! What glorious attendants minister unto you, even to the least heir of salvation among you!

Solitary as any one of you may seem in many a path of duty, that is the very situation where he is attended by company of the best and noblest kind; thus was Jacob attended at Mahanaim. And indeed it may be adopted as a general remark, that where the world closes against any servant of God, there heaven opens to him. What a wonderful mixture is there of poverty and dignity in the condition of the children of God, even as there was in that of Christ himself upon earth, to whose image and likeness all his people conformed.

The action of the angel, in waking the prophet and bidding him “Arise and eat,” may be spiritually applied to many a one among ourselves. Though the weary pilgrim stood in great need of bodily refreshment, he does not appear to have felt the want of it, and required first to be incited externally to make use of it.

So an afflicted soul may often need nothing so much as the food of the Word of God; and yet, by brooding over his troubles, may go on for some time insensible of this want. Though he open the Bible, he may feel no attraction for the truths it contains, nor any desire for the benefit of Divine ordinances, and may be ready to ask, “What good will these things do me?” This a pitiable and melancholy condition; but the help of God arrives to relieve it, either by a suggestion immediately from his Spirit, or by the medium of a Christian friend, or of some apparently accidental, but in reality providential occurrence, that he should arise and eat; should take up and read, or go and hear the word of life. He now finds a spiritual appetite returned, and his soul is strengthened by the Word of God.

III. “And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken

on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did

eat and drink, and laid him down again.”

Thus he appears to have been so well lodged and provided for here in the wilderness, as to leave him nothing more to wish for. Oh the tender compassion of God; for “so he giveth his beloved sleep” (Psalms 127:2). Yet how few learn to cast all their care and anxiety about temporal

provision on Him who careth for them!

What a serious and difficult thing does it seem to many of us to practice that instruction of the inspired apostle, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” To “cast all our care on Him who careth for us,” appears, to blind natural reason, a perilous method of proceeding. But is not our reluctance to follow this direction a reason why we experience, in our own lives, so little of His aid, who ordereth all things both in heaven and earth, and who hath the hearts of all in his hand!

His remarkable interpositions in behalf of Elijah we are too apt to regard as prodigies of a golden age long since gone by; hence almost the only sounds heard in the tabernacles of the righteous, at present, are sighs and lamentations for embarrassments, disappointed prospects, and unsuccessful undertakings.

The bread and the water with which God nourishes souls in the wilderness, are the truths of his word and promises. But as the cake was baked on the coals for Elijah, and the water placed at his head in a cruse, so we need to have the truths of God’s word prepared for us by his Spirit, and set before us by his providence, that we may take the benefit of them for our spiritual refreshment and nourishment.

And how refreshing and strengthening do we find those truths, when God has again spread his table for us, and we again feed on the bread of life, by faith in our hearts, with thanksgiving, and refresh ourselves with the divine promises, and rejoice with renewed confidence in the divine favor! Then do we thank God for the season of hunger and sorrow through which we passed; it then seems to us as if we had never before feasted at such a passover; and we become more sensible than ever of the value of that bread of life which our gracious God has prepared for us. Hence we learn the goodness of God’s ways in suffering us for a while to feel hunger, or deadness of spirit.

Elijah, apparently more asleep than awake, stretched out his hand, tasted the bread, drank of the water, and sank down again, weak and weary, and fell asleep. For that he fell asleep may be supposed from the angel’s touching him a second time. We, however, should have thought that his surprise would have been so excited, and his thoughts so set in motion, as to have rendered it impossible for him to fall asleep again immediately. But here is no appearance of surprise expressed. He partakes of the refreshment, not as if he were lying in a desolate uninhabited wilderness, but as if he were at home in his own dwelling.

If he was not in a half awakened state, he must have been absorbed, like Mary Magdalene at her visit to the sepulchre, in higher thoughts. This is no unsupposable case; and, spiritually applied, it is a very common one. Persons of weak faith, and under strong spiritual temptation, may hear the word of consolation, and receive it; but taking only a hasty draught of the living waters of promise, the enjoyment is soon gone again. It is however not without its use. If it effects nothing more, it serves to revive and confirm the persuasion, that He who can cast a ray of comfort into the benighted soul, is able at any moment to send into it the full day of peace.

The sleep of Elijah serves also to remind us of those who are for the most part spiritually asleep, and have never yet been thoroughly awakened. they eat and drink, or, in other words, they hear much that is good, they read the Bible, and are regular in attending the worship of God, yet

everything seems lost upon them, and not the smallest decided proof of spiritual life is discoverable in them. Yet let no one venture to say, before their course is ended, that such persons have eaten and drunken in vain. They may suddenly one day prove the contrary to your face. The food they have received may at unawares be found effectually to have nourished them. Let all diligently use the means of grace.

IV. “The angel of the Lord” then “came again

the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise

and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.”

Though God allows his servants to be tried beyond their own inherent strength, he never suffers them to be tried beyond what he himself enables them to undergo. He prepares and strengthens before he leads them to any conflict, before lays his cross upon them. When we enjoy days of special refreshment in spirit, it is generally a sign that new trials of faith await us, for which, through this refreshment, we must make vigilant preparation.

Elijah now “arose, and did eat and drink,” and his slumber and weariness disappeared. The word of the angel seems to have quickened his soul as much as the food had refreshed his body. The angel had spoken to him of a further “journey” the prophet had now to undertake: which was the same as telling him that God had a new commission for him, and that he was still on a career of which he had not yet seen the end even at a distance. It had seemed as if his own “heart” had “devised his way” into this wilderness; he finds that “the Lord directed his steps,” and was still directing them. He is again persuaded that God is present with him, and he springs up as a young roe, and no longer goes “whither he would,” but, in the name of his gracious God, he again sets out on his way.

O how blessed is it, after going on for a season in uncertainty and darkness, sighing with David, “I am sorrowful and forsaken,” unexpectedly to discover some indubitable proof of the divine presence with us, some scriptural evidence that things are really different from what we supposed, that we are really walking in a path which God has marked out for us!

V. Elijah is now himself again; he has found God to be the lifter up of his head

“And he went the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God.”

He travels through the sandy desert alone; yet not alone, for God is with him. He is not anxious as to whither the Lord is directing him, or about the purpose intended by this strange journey. Forty days and nights he travels on, without rest or intermission, through the silent wilderness-a miraculous journey, which was performed in the strength of the food with which God, by his angel, had refreshed him. To help by many means or by few, or with no means at all, is one and the same thing to Him, who upholdeth all by the word of his power.

He, who multiplied the loaves and the fishes at his pleasure, could give to a little all the virtue of much. In Short, Elijah had no need, during the whole journey, of either refreshment or rest. The hot wind during the day did not exhaust him, nor the difficulties of the night fatigue him. Thus he bore about with him, in the renewed courage of his spirit, and in the unexhausted strength of his limbs, an abiding seal and pledge that the Lord was with him, and that the hand of the Almighty sustained

him.

The desert, over which Elijah traveled forty days and nights, was the same through which the tribes of Israel traveled during forty years, under the convoy of the cloudy and fiery pillar. Surely this, if any, was holy ground. It had been traversed by the feet of the mighty, it was rich with the most stupendous associations of thought, and with the most interesting recollections. Here the whole miraculous history of the ancient fathers would revive before him in the liveliest colors. Fresh images and scenes from that age of wonders would recur to his mind at every step, and the very profound silence around him would assist in the consideration of the sublime things of which these spots had been once the theatre.

As often as he descended into a green and palmy vale, he alighted in spirit upon some resting-place of his fathers. As often as the shade of an overhanging rock received him, it was as if the incense of the sanctuary breathed around him; for the prayers of the pilgrims of God had hallowed these shades. Here or there, he would think, perhaps Moses had rested and taken counsel in the sacred circle of his elders; and the leader of Israel would still seem kneeling before the Lord, and speaking to him, “as a man talketh with his friend.” Thus one heart-elating thought would follow another. The history of the forty years’ journey would attain a form and a vitality beyond what he had hitherto realized. At one time he would seem to be gathering the manna with the ancient fathers; at another, to be standing with with the wounded before the brazen image of the serpent, and feeling with them the return of health. Presently he would be in spirit at the altar which Moses built, and called it “Jehovah-Nissi,” the Lord my banner; and then again he would hear the desert resound with loud thanksgivings and solemn hymns of praise to the faithfulness’ and truth of Jehovah.

Every new scene on which he entered, would bring before him some new event and feature of those journeyings which were irradiated with the glory of God; and whatever consolation and encouragement is comprised in these histories, would rush upon him with sublime and overwhelming wonder, or exhilarate him with a ring of hope and joy, that seemed to give wings to his feet, and banish the last remains of fear and care from his spirit.

Assured that he was pursuing his way under the shadow of the same Almighty hand which once covered the whole host of Israel, he would cheerfully pursue his journey, not doubting that he was led by the right hand of Him who under the juniper tree had given the sign for him to depart, and had endued his feeble frame with a strength which no toil or fatigue of the long journey was able to diminish; and that as soon as the end was attained, he should be bidden to rest and lay down his traveling staff in peace and safety.

What a blessed gift is faith to the children of God! Its wondrous power deprives privations of their horrors. That which is distant it brings near; it develops hidden things, and awakens past events to new life. It merges the gloom of the present into the bliss of the future, and paints the sky of many a departing sun with the dawning radiance of a better world.

In the midst of sublunary changes, it anticipates a peaceful paradise. It peoples our bereaved family circles with holy and heavenly company; associates both worlds in close connection, and unites things past, present and to come. In its light, the sacred narratives seem acted over again, and our own personal history becomes a sacred record of Providence. It has the power of realizing

the dead as if they were alive; the ancients are our contemporaries, although their ashes repose in the sepulchre for six thousand years. By its voice they still converse with us, although to human ears they speak no more; by its realizing aid they visit us in our darkness with kindness and consolation; by its light we see a cloud of them as witnesses encamped around us; and whatever grace they experienced is, through faith, appropriated to ourselves.

It nourishes us with the promises made to Abraham; it sustains us with the strong consolation of the oath divinely sworn unto Isaac; it gives us the staff of Jacob to support our steps; it enables us with Moses' rod to divide the sea, and with David we leap over the wall and rampart! O faith, thou door-keeper of every sanctuary, thou master over all the treasures of God! May he that is thine Author draw near unto us; and he that is thy Finisher incline himself towards us!

~ end of chapter 11 ~

02.12. Arrival at Mount Horeb

Arrival at Mount Horeb

CHAPTER TWELVE

Many a true Christian has enjoyed luminous intervals in his life, which may be called his moments on Tabor. Such an interval was that experienced by Moses, when, overpowered by holy zeal for the Honor of God, and carried away by the ardor of a superhuman love, forgetting himself, he broke out, in the astonishing words:-“Yet now if thou wilt forgive them their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book!” And such, if we follow the common translation of the passage, Romans 9:3, appears to have been the case with the apostle Paul, when he said, he could wish that himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. If our cool, sober, calculating people of the present day are unable to comprehend ecstatic expressions like these, it is no wonder, neither is it any proof that holier men were not sincere in their wonderful desires.

An infant is incompetent to enter into the ideas of a courageous and valiant warrior; still there were such men as Gideon and David. Even Moses or Paul, after the Divine ecstasy of the moment was over, might feel astonished at the elevation to which their souls had been raised. For in such moments they were transported very far above their ordinary feelings.

You know, besides Paul and Moses, a third who was all along actuated thus; who said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” He actually carried his desire into effect: He was willingly “made a curse for us.” Many who call themselves Christians shake their heads at this truth; they do not believe that the love of the Lord Jesus went so far as to undergo the penalty belonging to the sins of the world. Were these adversaries of the atonement in the right, it would follow that the disciples, Moses and Paul, were above their Master in charity to Mankind. Therefore, from this very love on the part of his disciples, we can show that they are in the wrong. For, from whom did those disciples derive their fervor of love? Was it from themselves? Certainly not! It was from their Saviour’s fountain of love. Out of his fullness did they receive. As then the stream is, such must the fountain be; and what we perceive in the copy, must be found in the original. There is therefore a love in the heart of Jesus, which could desire to become an anathema for sinners; else how could such a love have been found in his disciples?

The recollection, however, of such love as this, in Moses or in Paul, is not altogether advantageous to the prophet Elijah, in comparing the scene of his life which we are now about, to contemplate for it contains a striking contrast to the conduct of those two saints.

“And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks

before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake" (1 Kings 19:9-11).

Here we have the man of God again before us, in circumstances which are overruled to increase his humility and experience the life of God in his soul. The particulars which this portion of Elijah's history brings before us are well worth our attentive consideration.

Here is,

I. The night's lodging in the cave;

II. The Divine reproof;

III. The prophet's complaint;

IV. The direction to appear before the, I. The prophet's efforts to restore Israel to the faith

of their fathers had apparently failed The mighty miracle on Carmel seemed to have produced no other fruit than redoubled hatred on the part of the inveterate idolaters: Jezebel's murderous intentions had been brought to ripeness by this event. The prophet having been informed of this, fled without Divine direction. "He went whither he would, to save his life." His distress increased with every step, and reached its height upon his arrival in the wilderness. He thought himself forsaken of God; in having become weary of life, he prayed for death; whereupon God, by an angel, sent him refreshment in body and spirit. He learnt that he was still conducted of God, and that the divine thoughts towards him were thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give him an expected end. Jeremiah 29:11. In the strength of the food of which he had partaken, and of the joyfully surprising angelic message, he entered upon the "hard journey," and traversed the desert for forty days and nights, with high expectations of the result, and of the end that should terminate these solitary wanderings.

Now, when the forty days are drawing to a close, he sees in the azure distance a rocky mountain glistening before him, which soon becomes better known to him by its peculiar appearance and remarkable summits. It was Mount Sinai, towering like a magnificent temple. Another height near it appeared like its antechamber; it was lower than the former, but as boldly formed, and as wild and rocky. This was Horeb. What must have been the sensations of an Elijah at first beholding theses sacred and ever-memorable heights! What elevating thoughts and delightful hopes might then have engaged his mind! Here, he might suppose, God could again meet him in all the glory of his benignity, and unfold to him truths respecting the restoration of Israel which would change his mourning into rejoicing, and gird him with gladness.

- As it was on Horeb that the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Elijah would in a lively manner be reminded of the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush, and would be refreshed in expecting it for himself.

- As it was the rock of Horeb was smitten and yielded a miraculous supply of water to the hosts of Israel, Elijah would here think of a water which would refresh and invigorate his soul.

- As it was on Horeb that the uplifted hand of the man of God prostrated the hostile strength of Amalek, and gave Joshua his glorious victory over the armies of the aliens, Elijah perhaps might

reckon upon hearing from Horeb the sentence upon Ahab and Jezebel which would put down blasphemy and the destruction of souls in Israel!

- On Horeb God renewed his gracious covenant with his people, after he had delivered them from the iron furnace of Egypt; and Elijah might expect a renewal of his covenant with the Lord, fresh assurances and promises respecting his work of reformation.

Elijah being arrived at the mount of God, we may further imagine him climbing the rocky ridges to its summit with feelings of profoundest veneration. His feet stand upon Horeb, and doubtless his spirit prays in fervent expectation of further communications from the Lord. He would naturally experience alternations of hope and fear. He cannot but think that the Lord has conducted him to Horeb, yet he knows not wherefore, at least on what particular errand.

He is in an almost indescribable solitude. Nothing but rugged layers of stone, one above another, around him, and tangled thickets, with here and there a melancholy cypress or a gloomy tamarisk. Also, the devout wanderer might be at a loss what to think of his situation, and feel as if he were banished from the whole world! No trace of any human being is to be perceived.

The horror of this lonely, forsaken situation would be augmented by the approach of night. Ought he to travel on? He cannot do it. He feels the limit of his journey to be assigned him here. The strength which bore him through the desert, perhaps, has forsaken him; and, no less so, the cheerful spirit and the courage to proceed, and therefore nothing is left him but to seek out some retreat which may shelter him from wild beasts and poisonous serpents. He wraps his mantle around him, creeps into a gloomy cave, of which there are many on this rocky mountain, and lies down in order to pass the night in this melancholy lodging. This was, probably, one of the most anxious nights of his life; for, instead of enjoying the cheering manifestations of the Divine presence, or realizing any of the high expectations he might have indulged on his miraculous journey to Horeb, he was obliged, in most comfortless outward circumstances, to bury himself in the horrors of a desolate cavern. It may be easily supposed that no sleep could close the good man’s eyes that melancholy night.

Satan, too, would not be inactive in his attempts against so decided an enemy, but would summon all his strength to overthrow the faith of the hard-tried prophet and to wound him with his fiery darts. For the circumstances in which Elijah was now placed would give to the father of lies great advantage in tempting him to doubt and distrust the love, and word, and promises of God, as if the Keeper of Israel himself could sleep, or, if not, could delight in chastising and trying his servants. “Where is now thy God?” might, be suggested to Elijah. “Where is now thy boasted happiness in his service?” And who knows whether the prophet was still ready for the conflict, or took the field fully armed, with cheerful courage, to resist such wiliness of Satan.

This at least we know, that if the invisible arms had not held him, which were wont to uphold him, especially when he was least aware of it, the temptation of despair would have swallowed him up.

II. Elijah takes up his abode in the cave

He thus further experiences that God’s ways with his servants lead to mortification and total self-denial. While he is there, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, “What doest thou here, Elijah?”

Elijah at once recognizes the voice of the Almighty. But what an unexpected question was this! What a contrast to the expectations he had probably carried with him to Horeb! Perhaps he had thought that the whole journey from Samaria hither had been a Divine path, and that the Lord himself had called him to Horeb in order to enrich him there with spiritual enjoyments. And now such a salutation, or rather such an alarming inquiry! It must, however, have served to undeceive him, and lead him to consider the state of his heart. It placed before him the arbitrariness of his flight from Jezreel. It reminded him especially of the weakness of his faith; it must have made him ashamed, and have incited him to the profoundest humiliation.

When troubles come upon us, and we are disposed to lament over disappointed hopes and undertakings, God is gracious in making known to us our infirmities and sins, which are in one way or another the occasion of every disquietude. Unless this is done, we are in danger of misunderstanding his dealings with us, and of distrusting his love and faithfulness. A sense of our own guilt and unworthiness is the best preservative against those pangs of the heart which Asaph speaks of, Psalms 73:21. As it serves to explain many apparently hard passages of the divine conduct towards us, so it prevents the peevish and complaining thoughts which I would often arise within us respecting the hardships of our condition. How satisfied do we then become! nay, how heartily glad and thankful when only a glimpse of forgiveness, a single ray of undeserved favor shines once more into our hearts! We seem as if needing nothing more to make us happy; we submit humbly and serenely under the divine will, and all murmurings are exchanged for contrite and thankful confessions. “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee” (Daniel 9:7-8).

“What doest thou here?” By an inquiry of this sort, divinely applied to the conscience, many a one has been shaken out of carnal security for the rest of his life. Painful indeed has been the experience many a sinner when thus overtaken on the paths which lead to death. But this has sometimes ended in the most happy result; for men have thus, like the prodigal son, “come to themselves,” turned to their Father’s house and found a happy welcome there. But we may be even associated with the children of God, and yet the same question may surprise and alarm the conscience, “What doest thou here?” suggesting that we do not really belong to such society as we have mingled with, and may thus produce great distress and perplexity in the soul; leading it however to deep self-examination. It is also made the means of awakening sleepers in Zion, who are hereby aroused to spiritual conflict; and the unwatchful and careless are prevented from going further astray.

Thus it acts as a means of separating them more entirely from the spirit and the ways of this vain world, and of attaching them more securely to the service of the Lord Jesus.

But, alas, how many among us are there, of whom, although they bear the Christian name, it is to be feared that they are wandering in the wilderness out of the way of God? O that the Almighty may this day meet them with the inquiry, “What doest thou here?” may bring them to their right minds, and guide them into that way of peace which hitherto they have not known!

III. The prophet, at this question, recollects himself

He answers, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts.” This, indeed, was true, and he could say with the Psalmist, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”

Alas, in the Laodicean character of the present day, how little is there of this spirit! Men can see and hear much that, is contrary to God, with an indifference that speaks but too plainly how lukewarm they are in his service, how unconcerned they are for his glory.

Where, alas, do we see that fervor with which the ancient saints, the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors testified to the truth in their days? How earnestly did they cry day and night to God, that he would exalt himself in his own strength among the nations! Where is that self-devotedness which Moses showed when he prayed, “Yet if now thou wilt, forgive their sin- and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book;” where do we now find such fervent intercession for others? O pray, pray, my brethren, that the spirit of ancient wisdom, love, and zeal may again be poured out with awakening and reviving energy upon us!

“The children of Israel,” continues Elijah, “have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword.”

Now, if this be a sufficient cause for being zealous for the honor of God, how is it that we continue so unmoved? Why do we not glow with zeal for the Lord of Hosts? Are not the banners of rebellion against God waving openly enough around us? and are there not enough blasphemers and despisers, who have forsaken the covenant, in the midst of us? Must the name of God be still more openly profaned than it is already, in word and in deed, amongst us? And must the measure of iniquity become still more full, before we will wrestle with God, that he may exalt himself in the earth, and fill it with his glory? Is not this the reason of our lukewarmness, that we do not keep our own hearts with all diligence, out of which are the issues of life?

Personal and practical piety, real spiritual-mindedness, is a thing too little sustained by the diligent use of means in our closets. Is not this the true state of the case? Do we indeed give ourselves time to allow the fire of devotional love to kindle in our hearts? Or do we not suffer ourselves, after some few superficial performances in private, to be led away to other pursuits? How then is it ever likely that, in such a state of mind, we should be truly zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and for the spiritual interests of our brethren, or be able to say, with Jeremiah, “I am pained at my very heart;” or, “It was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and was unable to restrain myself” (Jeremiah 4:19; Jeremiah 20:9).

Elijah says further, “I, even I only, am left.”

The only one, he means, on the field of battle; for he was not the only child of God in Israel; for the others had fled, or were hidden in the rocks.

“And they seek my life, to take it away.”

He does not disguise it, that to save his own life he had left Samaria and fled to the wilderness, but relates the matter with all sincerity and candor.

God is gracious to those who open their hearts to him, however it may reflect upon themselves. But however candid this confession of Elijah may be, it does not sound quite right. However much holy indignation it expresses at the general contempt put upon the name of the Lord, there is human chagrin and vexation mixed with it, and it betrays an undue excitement of natural feeling.

Moses, when he placed himself in the breach for his idolatrous people, and entreated the Lord to blot him out of his book if he would not forgive them, appears greater to us, and in a more glorious light, than Elijah does in this instance. For he seems to accuse his people with some natural vexation and vehemence and even to plead against hem before the Lord. Nay, more; his saying to God, how very jealous he had been for him, and then laying before him the fruitlessness of this jealousy and the unexpected and grievous result of his activity, seems to imply some complaint against God himself, as if he had said, “Lord, why hast thou done this to me? How couldst thou leave thy servant to be treated thus? How so forsake the work of thine own hands?”

The Lord, however, purposes answering their accusations himself; and vouchsafes him such a reply as will preserve him, all his life after, from similar mistakes.

IV. “And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord” This divine injunction, I could wish, in a certain sense, that you would also lay to heart. It has reference to all who are situated in some respects as Elijah. The cave from which he was bidden to go forth, may remind us of the darkness and perplexity in which our own hearts have involved us. Happy he who perceives it, and whose eyes are opened to see the spiritual darkness and corruption generated from his own bosom! But he must not think to bury himself in this. It would be perverse and injurious so to do. Many amongst us however have often done so; they have imprisoned themselves in the mere thoughts of their own hearts, and we hear nothing from some, but complainings of the deadness, depravity, poverty and helplessness of their souls: truths, all good and salutary in themselves, but wretchedly misapplied to paralyze every spiritual and benevolent exertion. O, go ye forth from such a cavern of darkness, and stand upon the mount before the Lord! You will find neither life, light nor peace in your own hearts. Go forth, in spirit, from your gloomy cell to the mount: behold the Lamb of God: look up to him who was suspended on the cross for the ungodly; contemplate his spirit, his love, his merits! It is this which makes the believer courageous, joyful, and strong; and imparts new life to his spirit.

The same may be said to those who are troubled with evil thoughts, and incited to evil actions. He that busies himself in the painful consideration of such things, who lingers amidst the dark horrors of these temptations, looking only at the fiery darts which crowd upon him; he who stays in such a cavern as this, is liable to be swallowed up in despair. But let us go forth out of the cave; let us stand upon the mount before the Lord, where Jesus presents himself, having been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, and we shall find him in all points able also to succor them that are tempted. In the mount, the Lord shall be seen as having “spoiled principalities and powers, as having made a show of them openly, and as ascended on high, having led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.”

Contemplate this mighty Conqueror, in whom you have also overcome; bring all your wretchedness before his throne, roll your burden upon him, and he shall sustain you; courage and strength shall be given to you; you shall have victory and triumph over the world, the devil and the flesh.

The same may be said to all who suffer under the pressure of temporal trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, disgrace or any other adversity. Do the waves of this world thus toss you? Look not with Peter at the storm, instead of looking to Him who can rebuke it; look not with Martha to the pit of corruption, instead of to Him who is the resurrection and the life; this is only to imprison ourselves

spiritually in our own gloomy cave. There can be neither joy nor peace in doing this.

Go forth! Go forth! Stretch forth the hand of faith toward the mighty and outstretched arm of Divine love; spread the wings of hope; stand forth upon the mount whereon is laid the sure foundation of Zion. Hereby you will learn something of the paternal heart of Him, who, though his ways are mysterious, nevertheless doeth all things well, and you will gain a prospect of that better country where “they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”

Whatever our circumstances may be, to place ourselves on every occasion before the Lord, with an open heart, without reserve or guile, is the grand secret of happiness and peace this world. Yes, and when the outward man itself perisheth, and the eye grows dim in the shadow of death, the soul shall hear a voice behind it, saying, “Go forth, and stand on the heavenly mount before the Lord!”

~ end of chapter 12 ~

02.13. The Manifestation on Mount Horeb

The Manifestation on Mount Horeb CHAPTER THIRTEEN The children of God in this world are in close and wonderful connection with Christ, their head, and with each other. This connection consists not merely in the unity of their sentiments, faith and conduct; the communion of saints is a deep and blessed mystery, and is very properly distinguished as one of the articles of the Christian faith.

Our blessed Lord speaks of believers as one, in a unity like that which subsists between the Father and himself as man. In various places of Scripture they are represented as composing one body, united to their glorious head, Christ Jesus. Thus Paul says, 1 Corinthians 12:26-27, “Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” “If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.” He also extends this representation further still, and calls the union amongst them a mystery.

Now those to whom this mystery is in any measure unfolded, find it an invaluable treasure, O it is one of the most consoling, one of the most refreshing truths of the Gospel, that all who believe are one. Let the consciousness of this mysterious unity and fellowship accompany us to the scene which we are now about to contemplate, and lead us to rejoice in the glorious and gracious manifestation of God granted to the prophet Elijah upon mount Horeb, as an exhibition of kindness vouchsafed not to him alone, but to us also, as members of one body in Christ.

“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:11-13).

Need I say, my friends, that it is a majestic scene to which we are now approaching? It is an event as richly significant, and as abundantly consolatory as any we meet with in the annals of God’s servants.

Let us then, I. Consider it in its historical course;

II. Inquire into its immediate object.

I. “Go forth,” it had been said to Elijah, “and stand

upon the mount before the Lord” The prophet hears it, and leaves his cave; and no sooner is he gone forth, than signs occur which announce to him the approach of the Almighty. The sacred historian here, indeed, depicts in simple language a most sublime scene.

The first sign was a tremendous wind. Just before, probably, the deepest silence had prevailed throughout this dreary wilderness; all is now in the most dreadful uproar about him. The mountain tempest breaks forth, and the bursting rocks thunder as if the four winds, having been confined there, had, in an instant, broken from their prisons to fight together. The clouds are driven about in the sky like squadrons of combatants rushing to conflict. The sandy desert is like a raging sea tossing its curling billows to the sky. Sinai is agitated, as if the terrors of the law-giving were renewed around it. The prophet feels majesty of the Lord; it is awful and appalling. It is not a feeling of peace, and of the Lord's blissful nearness, which possesses Elijah's soul in this tremendous scene-it is rather a feeling of distressing distance; "a strong wind went before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind."

The terrors of an earthquake next ensue. The very foundations of the hills shook and were removed. The mountains and the rocks, which were rent by the mighty wind, threaten now to fall upon one another. Hills sink down and valleys rise; chasms yawn, and horrible depths unfold, as if the earth was removed out of its place. The prophet, surrounded by the ruins of nature, feels still more of that Divine majesty which "looketh upon the earth, and it trembleth." But he still remains without any gracious communication of the Lord in the inner man. The earthquake was only a second herald of the Deity. It went before the Lord, "but the Lord was not in the earthquake."

When this had ceased, an awful fire, no common fire, passes by. Elijah, lost in adoring astonishment, beholds the awfully sublime spectacle, and the inmost sensation of his heart must have been that of surprise and dread; but he enjoys as yet no delightful sense of the divine nearness; "the Lord was not in the fire."

The fire disappears, and tranquility spreads gradually, like the stillness of the sanctuary, over all nature; and it seems as if every hill and dale, yea, the whole earth and skies lay in silent homage at the footstool of eternal Majesty. The very mountains seem to worship; the whole scene is hushed to profound peace; and now he hears "a still small voice." And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, in token of referential awe and adoring wonder, and went forth, and stood at the entrance of the cave.

II. If, now, we inquire into the peculiar signification

and primary intention of this Divine manifestation at Horeb,

we can hardly remain long in doubt about it

It seems that the Lord intended thus to lead the prophet out of a variety of doubts and sorrows in which he had lost himself. Outward events had appeared to him quite enigmatical; and his inward thoughts were very confused and painful. He had lost his clue to Providence in the unexpected turn of events which the kingdom of God in Israel had suddenly taken.

It was in God's name, and by his commission, that he had forsaken his native mountains of Gilead, and had gone to Samaria to recover backsliding Israel to the faith of their forefathers. The means for such a work had been placed in his hands by God himself. It was given him to shut heaven and to open it again. He had performed signs and wonders, such as had not been done in Israel for centuries, and had labored as abundantly as any saint before him. From such exertions Elijah expected to witness effects produced; and he probably hoped for nothing less than a penitent

return of the whole people to the Service of the Lord. The fervent man of God, however, erred in his calculation.

The result of his faithful labors, which had been wrought in God, corresponded not with his hopes, but proved just the opposite to them. At the very moment when He had hoped to lead back the regenerated people with psalms and hymns of rejoicing, to the altar of the living God, he sees himself exposed to danger in every direction, and his labor appears to have been in vain. Such things were too mysterious for him, and he could not reconcile them with his present ideas of God.

This doubting state of mind had been augmented in the solitary cave at Horeb, and had now attained its height; when the majestic signs-the wind that rent the mountains-the earthquake and the fire-passed before him, but the Lord was not in them, nor in any one of them. Elijah did not derive from them those spiritual blessings which are mentioned by Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, as having been given to the fathers who “were baptized the cloud and in the sea; who did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them; and that Rock was Christ.”

None of these blessings were typically expressed or conveyed in the tremendous manifestations given to Elijah. He did not, nor was it intended that he should obtain from them a single crumb of that spiritual food, or a single drop of that spiritual drink. They were not the means of any sweet union between his soul and his God, or of any gracious communication. He only felt himself overwhelmed, in an awful manner, by the greatness and majesty of God, and by a sense of his own infinite distance from him; and all this wrought neither love nor peace in his spirit, but served rather to make it shrink into bondage, and to produce that state of mind which Isaiah and Job felt, when the former said, “Woe is me! I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips;” and the latter, “Thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.”

But how very differently did the prophet feel, when, after this tumult of the elements, he heard that small still voice which gave to his terrified spirit a taste of the gracious lovingkindness of his God! His experience surely must then have been like that of the seventy elders, who saw the God of Israel in the very same desert, and in the same place, Exodus 24:10-11, and on whom “he laid not his hand.” His presence did not destroy or consume them, but only refreshed and delighted them.

A happiness so ineffable seems now to have been given to Elijah. The Lord now “loosed his hands;” his oppressed heart was “set at liberty.” All within him rejoiced at God’s gracious nearness; he felt the tender mercy of the Lord; he covered his face with his mantle, and was willing to lay himself down at the feet of his God, and to give himself up more decidedly than ever to him.

He had heard in the strong and mighty wind an echo, as it were, of the dreadful reproofs and words of thunder with which he had struck the consciences of the people of Israel. The earthquake represented the plagues and judgments which he had inflicted upon the country. The fire would remind him of the flames of Carmel, and of the bloody exertion of which it had been the signal.

In this way Elijah appeared as another Moses with the burning torch of the law-a herald of God who is not to he mocked. But the zealous prophet was mistaken in promising himself, from this procedure, results which never accompany the thunders of the law, but are only wont to be coupled with the still small voice of the Gospel.

What had he expected? Nothing less than an immediate penitent return of all Israel to the God of their fathers. In this hope he went too far. He was not justified in cherishing such expectations; and it was this that was to be brought to his mind, in a convincing manner, on Horeb. Amidst the terrible phenomena which passed before him, he was to be taught, in a lively manner, that the manifestation merely of the power and majesty of God, where its burning brilliance was not tempered by grace, might certainly inspire the sinner with anxiety and terror, but could not really humble and convert him.

He was to become conscious by it that the demonstration of infinite holiness, unassociated with “the kindness and love of God, our Saviour,” can only overawe and repel; but is by no means adapted to produce contrition, or penitential confession, or to incline the heart to the Lord with fervent affection. He now better learnt that what especially softens, melts and converts the soul, is only grace and the enjoyment of it; and that the blessed results, which he had anticipated from the thunders of the law and the divine judgments, could only be produced by the lovingkindness and tender mercy of the Lord.

In the significant occurrences on Horeb, the pleasing prospect was further to be unfolded to him, that the Lord, who had not yet finished his work of reformation in Israel, would, in due time, after the earthquake, storm and fire, come also with the voice of the gentle whisper, which the hearts of men would then be unable to resist, and which would bow down the mighty; and with what joy must Elijah have laid hold of this promise!

But was his labor in Israel a lost labor? Had it been superfluous and useless? By no means! The prophet was to learn that, just as the terrible signs he had seen on Horeb had not been unavailing to himself, but had made him more susceptible of the gracious and gentle whisper that followed them, and increased his desire for the manifestation of the lovingkindness of God, so in like manner, the Lord would point out to him that his prophetic exertions in Israel had not been without salutary consequences.

They had prepared the hearts of the people for impressions of another kind; and thus he was taught that his peculiar vocation, generally speaking, consisted in ploughing up the hardened soil of their backsliding minds; in presenting the forgotten law in all its majesty before their eyes; in awakening the sleepers, and terrifying the secure with the thunders of the law, and thereby exciting amongst them an earnest desire for the Gospel, and a hunger and thirst after the righteousness which is by faith, that it might be by grace.

Thus Elijah had his scruples and difficulties cleared up; and in what a wonderful and glorious manner! By this single divine act, the ways of God were fully justified to his mind; the mystery was brought, in a gentle but most convincing manner, to a sense of his mistakes; and whilst on the one hand the honor of God was gloriously vindicated, the prophet on the other hand was deeply humbled, and constrained with all his heart to confess, “Thou, Lord, art righteous; but unto me belongeth confusion of face!”

And even though Elijah, soon after, repeated the complaint, it was then in a totally different spirit from that in which he uttered it before. It proceeded then from a humbled mind. The gloomy vexation, the disturbed temper, the inward strife and murmuring, had all disappeared. The jarring discords of his beclouded mind were dissolved, and harmony was restored in his soul.

Thus, my friends, I have endeavored to give you some explanation of those mysterious events which took place on Horeb, at least with respect to their immediate meaning and object. That this history has remained enigmatical to so many readers, may probably arise from the excessive, or rather let me say, improper ideas they formed of the sanctity of our prophet. They viewed him as a being that was no longer liable to human errors, and incapable of deviating from the path of divine simplicity, and of humble, filial, and unreserved submission to his Lord.

But Elijah was a man “subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17). He was also not yet entirely free from what we all inherit from Adam; and the key to the wonderful conduct of the Lord towards him on Horeb, is to be looked for, not in the prophet’s perfection, but in his infirmity.

Yet, after all, how great must Elijah have been, that for his reproof and instruction, heaven and earth are moved, as it were; the rocks rend, and the mountains fall; and how must the mighty God have loved him, to make him an object off condescension!

Thus we find here a trace, and a beautiful one it is, of evangelical instruction in Horeb, in the vicinity of Mount Sinai itself.

Though the office of Elijah was rather secondary to that of Moses, than (like that of his illustrious antitype, John the Baptist), precursive of Christ, still it comprised the elements “of good things to come.” And could this holy prophet have unbosomed himself fully, according to the tenor of that evangelical character which shines through the veil of his awful severity, and according to the tenor of that “still small voice” which he heard, doubtless he had enough within him to have cheered the hearts of thousands.

But the time for such things was not arrived. The people among whom he resided were not ripe for such disclosures; hence he had to keep his faith almost to himself before God, and to merge the office of an evangelist in that of a terrible reprover.

Here then we leave Horeb, not without refreshment and blessing. May the Lord God, who is good and gracious, faithful and ready to forgive, incline to us all with the still small voice, and may our whole life be, in one sense, like the standing of Elijah before him with his face wrapped in his mantle! Amen.”

~ end of chapter 13 ~

02.14. Renewed Mission

Renewed Mission CHAPTER FOURTEEN

One of the most affecting and consoling narratives of the Old Testament, is that of the wonderful preservation of Moses in his infancy (Exodus 2:1-10). Lo, at the brink of the Nile, among the reeds, there floats a small ark or basket, made of bulrushes, and carefully secured from leaking by cement of slime and pitch. For a treasure indeed lies concealed in it-a goodly infant, acceptable to God, and dear and precious to its mother above everything in this world: she has therefore thus secured it, that in its floating cradle it might if possible escape the destruction which Pharaoh's cruel sentence had denounced upon all the newborn males of Israel.

A mother's love had prepared this infant's couch, with many silent tears and unspeakable anxiety; and while it lies there, in peril on the waters, the sisterly love of Miriam fixes, her in sight of it to watch its fate. God's providence brings the daughter of Pharaoh to the banks of the river, who, noticing the strange object, sends of her maidens to fetch it.

"And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call unto thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And she said, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

Thus, by the divine disposal, were the mother and the child again brought together.

Much spiritual comfort is derivable from this narrative. We who belong to Christ are hidden as it were in an ark, which cruelty cannot penetrate, nor the floods of the ungodly submerge. But many of us, like the infant Moses, who lay in the ark and wept, know not how safely we are thus preserved.

Many of us float upon the waves of this troublesome world, in the region of the leviathan and the piercing serpent, amidst many anxieties and terrific apprehensions. But, remember who watches over thee, O Christian believer! If thou perish, the eternal love of God must perish too: for into that ark hast thou been received, and none shall pluck thee out of the Saviour's hand. Nor shalt thou float upon the waters for ever.

Be of good cheer: though thou see nothing but night and death before thee, the providence of God, the Keeper of Israel, is nigh thee to watch over thee, as over all the Israel of God. The portion of sacred history now to be considered, will show how needless are all our distracting cares and anxieties.

"And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy

prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

“And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay” (1 Kings 19:13-17). This part of the narrative presents at first sight much that is strange. It seems to have no spiritual connection with the great event just before related, but rather to be at variance with it. Who, for instance, would have expected that the prophet should renew his former complaint, or the Lord should dismiss him with commissions and disclosures like these?

Yet it only requires a consideration of the matter, to elucidate most satisfactorily what thus is doubtful and obscure.

Let us, I. Take another glance at the manifestation on Horeb;

II. Listen to the prophet’s complaint;

III. Pause and consider the instructions he received;

IV. Inquire into the nature of those commissions with which the Lord dismisses him.

I. The majestic scene of wonders on Horeb has already passed before us,

and its meaning has been in some degree developed

It depicted the character of the Old Testament dispensation, and the office of the law as our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ; while, in the “still small voice,” we discern the gentle whisper of Gospel grace. Thus we are enabled to see these grand occurrences as taking place not for Elijah’s sake only, but for ours also; and we must not leave them without at least a glance at their rich and general import.

The Lord often comes to those to whom he graciously reveals himself, as he came to Elijah on Horeb. Has your own experience furnished nothing similar?

Do you know nothing of the storm which he sends before him, as it were, rending the mountains; of the earthquake, which subverts everything within us, and casts down imaginations; of a fire of terror and dread which precedes the Lord of glory? Are your rocks still unbroken? Have your heights not yet been cast down, nor the deceitful ground of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency removed from under you? And yet you imagine you have heard the gentle voice of grace! You are not perhaps aware that the father of lies approaches men occasionally as an angel of light, and whispers smooth things in their ears.

This destroyer is able to pervert the promises of God into the snares of death, and he considers those secured as his prisoners, who suffer themselves to be caught by his false assurances of Divine favor! O tremble at the artifices of the old serpent; and remember, that the comforter who seeks to quiet your conscience without mortifying your flesh, is not the Lord, but the wicked one! For Jesus does not draw near with his still small voice, without first overthrowing every high thing that exalts itself against him, and subverting the power of the old man within us.

- “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.”

- “Many shall Seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

Seeking is not sufficient here-it must be striven for. The new creation within us rises upon the ruins of the old and corrupt nature. Wherever grace builds, it first pulls down and it is by bringing to nought things that are, that God makes out of us what we by nature are not.

There was, some years ago, not far from this place, a very gifted preacher, who for several years preached with great earnestness and success the doctrine of the cross; but who, on that very account, was violently opposed. One of his opponents, a well-informed person, who had for a long time absented himself from the church, thought, one Sunday morning, that he would go and hear the man once more, to see whether his preaching might be more tolerable to him than it had been heretofore.

He went; and that morning the preacher was speaking of the narrow way, which he did not make either narrower or broader than the Word of God describes it. “A new creature in Christ, or eternal condemnation,” was the theme of his discourse; and he spoke with power, and not as a mere learned reasoner. During the sermon the question forced itself upon this hearer’s conscience, “How is it with myself? Does this man declare the real truth? If he does, what must inevitably follow from it?”

This thought took such a upon him, that he could not get rid of it amidst any of his engagements or amusements. But it became from day to day more and more troublesome; more and more penetrating; and threatened to embitter every joy of his life; so that at last he thought he would go to the preacher himself and ask him, upon his conscience, if he were convinced of the truth of that which he bad lately preached. He fulfilled his intention, and went to the preacher. “Sir,” said he to him, with great earnestness, “I was one of your hearers when you spoke, a short time since, of the only way of salvation. I confess to you that you have disturbed my peace of mind, and I cannot refrain from asking you solemnly before God, and upon your conscience, if you can prove what you asserted, or whether it was unfounded alarm.”

The preacher, not a little surprised at this address, replied with convincing certainty, that he had spoken the Word of God, and consequently infallible truth.

“What then is to become of us!” replied the visitor. His last word, us, startled the preacher; but he rallied his thoughts, and began to explain the plan of salvation to the inquirer, and to exhort him to repent and believe. But the latter, as though he had not heard one syllable of what the preacher said, interrupted him in the midst of it, and repeated, with increasing emotion, the anxious exclamation, “If it be truth, sir, I beseech you, what are we to do?”

Terrified, the preacher staggers back. “We!” thinks he, “what means this we?” and, endeavoring to stifle his inward uneasiness and embarrassment, he resumed his exhortations and advice. Tears came into the eyes of the visitor; he smote his hands together like one in despair, and exclaimed in an accent which might have moved a heart of stone, “Sir, if it be truth, we are lost and undone!”

The preacher stood pale, trembling, and speechless. Then overwhelmed with astonishment, with downcast eyes and convulsive sobbings he exclaimed, “Friend, down on your knees, let us pray and cry for mercy!” They knelt down, and prayed; and shortly afterwards the visitor took his leave.

The preacher shut himself up in his closet. Next Sunday, word was sent that the minister was unwell, and could not appear. The same thing happened the Sunday following. On the third Sunday the preacher made his appearance before his congregation, worn with his inward conflict, and pale, but his eyes beaming with joy, and commenced his discourse with the uprising and affecting declaration that he had now, for the first time, passed through the strait gate.

You will ask what had occurred to him in his chamber during the interval which had elapsed. A storm passed over before him- but the Lord was not in the storm; an earthquake-but the Lord was not in the earthquake; a fire-but the Lord was not in the fire. Then came a still small voice on which the man enveloped his face in his mantle and from that time knew what was the gospel, and what was graced.

No sooner was Elijah favored with the still small voice, than he wrapped his face in his mantle. This is an emblem of the Christian's state of mind, who veils his face with humility and overwhelming abasement before God. The law fills him with apprehension; the knowledge of sin casts him down to the ground; but the holy shame, the deep and silent contrition, which is so pleasing to God begins to be felt when the Lord has come with his still small voice.

Behold, it is said in Ezekiel 16:62-63, "I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy alarms when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

O yes, when such a whisper of the most unmerited mercy breathes upon us, our high looks are lowered-our lips are silent-we are overwhelmed with shame. But it is shame without distress; it is a trembling without slavish fear; it is a humiliation replete with love and blessedness.

O how well-pleasing is it to the Lord! We have already seen the prophet in various positions. We have seen him clothed with strength and intrepidity, contending like a lion with God's enemies; we have seen him in the tempest, with undaunted front, like a rock in the sea, unmoved by the winds and waves-but surely he never appeared more noble and amiable than here on Horeb, when at the still small voice of divine peace he bowed his mighty spirit, and, trembling with confusion and delight, wrapped his face in his mantle.

II. We further read, that he then went forth and stood at the entering in of the cave

He does not yet appear to have fully understood the meaning of these wonderful manifestations. And, while he stood there, "behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?"

This question, repeated the second time, seemed to direct him back to the scene of activity. We should have supposed that he would not have needed to be thus aroused again, but would, after such a gracious experience as had just before been given him, have hastened back, with winged feet, to the work of reformation. But instead of this, he breaks out again, to our astonishment, into his former complaint; as if the wonders God had shown him had been ineffectual.

"I have been very jealous," he answered, "for the Lord God of hosts; the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

The manifestations of God's grace to Elijah had been suited to convince him that his labors in Israel had not been in vain; but though he might now be ready to say, "Lord, I believe," he had still to complain and cry, "Help thou mine unbelief!"

His anxious spirit would still gain further satisfaction, as to the manner how, the time when, and means whereby the Lord's intimation would be fulfilled: and no sooner do his thoughts recur to the grievous and desperate state of things in Israel, than a feeling of gloom returns, and he pours complaint as before.

Believing in darkness, on God's bare word, where nothing like a fulfillment of the promise is to be seen, is certainly a great and glorious thing, by which God is honored; and O that such a faith were more frequently found amongst us! Alas, even where true faith really exists, it is but generally in a state of conflict, and seldom triumphant and perfected.

You find yourself, for instance, in a critical situation; the cares of this life and domestic embarrassments press you down; you can see no outlet-every human prospect of help is vanished. You now get an insight into the promises of God; "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Fear thou not, I am with thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands!" You know that He who thus speaks addresses you, and that his word is truth. You take the word, as a staff in your hand; you hope the best where, to all outward appearance, there is nothing to hope; you believe in the dark. This is believing on the Word of God. But have we generally such a faith as this?

III. Elijah is told to depart in faith "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus!"

He receives a threefold commission from the Lord, and with it strength to his faith, and provision for his journey.

"When thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." This is a reply to Elijah's first complaint, "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant." "I will appoint them a rod of correction," is the Divine answer.

"Hazael, the servant of the Syrian king, shall go through the briers and thorns for me. Go, and anoint him to be king over Syria!"

Hazael afterwards became king, and a severe scourge to the children of Israel. He did them great injury, burnt their fortified towns, slew their young men, and barbarously treated those whom nature in its most savage state might have pitied. He served the Lord as the staff of his indignation, and was one of the storms which were to go before the Lord, overturning the mountains and rending the rocks; and, when he had finished his work, he was laid aside.

Thus the Lord knows how to make use of the vessels of wrath; at one time as channels, through which he pours forth his indignation upon those who have not known him, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon his name; at other times he uses them as shepherds' dogs, that only serve to keep his flock together, and to bring back the wandering sheep.

Brethren, who knows what our own churches have still to experience? We are at present evidently under divine forbearance; can any one of us say how long it will last? It cannot be expressed how much mercy has already been expended upon us. Yet how many are there who really thank God,

and are heartily devoted to his Service? How would it be, if the Lord were suddenly to remove all his true children from the midst of us, and leave the impenitent to themselves. Would our population suffer a very perceptible decrease? Or is not the case with ourselves, as it is everywhere else; that the little flock of Israel amongst the Canaanites is like a drop in the ocean, and like the little stars, which, in a tempestuous night, twinkle only here and there among the black and stormy clouds.

Are not a great part of our people dead? Yes, though many of them hear the sound of the Word of life. This is very awful! For years together they have assembled in our congregations, but they seem only less and less sensible of the value of revealed truth. They have no hunger and thirst after it; no relish for it. Yea, neither the thunder of the law, nor the sound of its trumpet has any effect upon them; nor does the sweet melody of divine grace, and of the promises melt their hardened and worldly hearts. Many of our people are lukewarm-neither for nor against-neither cold nor hot; they hear the words of Christ, but they do them not. Surely, if they continue in this state, he will reject them with abhorrence A great part of our people praise Christ and the world with the same breath; they bow themselves before God and mammon in the same ceremony.

They desire to be merry with the children of this world, and to be blessed with the children of God; they wish to possess Christ, but will not, for his sake, part with the world. Such is by far the majority of persons amongst us, whether high or low, rich or poor. What will be the consequence of all this? May the Lord have mercy upon us! For if we go on in this way, nothing but evil can be prophesied concerning us!

The patience of God has an object, but we are defeating it. Who knows whether it may not soon be said to some angel in heaven, “Go now, and appoint this or that man for an Hazael; and let this deceiver, or that son of deceit, be placed over such and such a church! Who knows, whether the preachers, who now stand in your pulpits, may not be the last who shall ever offer the Gospel of peace to our unthankful churches, and whether the destroyers are not already training under the hand of Satan, and only wait for our departure to take possession of our places with the torch of the false prophet in their hand, kindled from the bottomless pit!

Perhaps, in a few years, all prophesyings amongst you will be at an end; the people will have become foolish and dissolute; the Lord’s flock will be taken away, and his fire extinguished to the very last spark. And when the righteous are removed from amongst us, and no holy hands bear up the ark any longer, its overthrow and ruin must be the result!

“O that thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!”

Yet forty years, and perhaps our Ninevehs will be overthrown; and wherever “the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together!” Awake, therefore, and sit down in sackcloth and in ashes; let each turn himself from his evil way, and from the iniquity of his hands. Who can tell if God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not!

Thus Elijah was to anoint Hazael, a stranger and foreigner, to be king over Syria, that he might become a scourge to Israel.

His second commission was to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi, one of themselves, to be king over Israel. This was an answer to the prophet’s second complaint, “They have thrown down thine

altars and slain thy prophets." As if God had said, "I will vindicate mine own glory; the house of Ahab shall be desolate, and Jehu shall be the axe to its roots!" And it so came to pass.

Jehu was the man that rooted out the house of Ahab from the earth, so that neither stump nor stalk was left. He caused Jezebel to be thrown from the window of her palace, and suffered her carcass to be trodden down as mire in the streets. He slew the seventy sons of Ahab in one day, and caused their heads to be displayed in two heaps at the gates of the town of Jezreel; destroyed the priests of Baal in their own temple, cast the holy vessels belonging to it into the flames, and made an end of the worship of Baal in Israel.

Such was the end of Ahab's house; and similar instances have been seen in modern times.

Even in our days, there is no want of examples of the rooting out of entire houses and families, because they hardened their hearts against the Lords, and bitterly opposed his children and servants. Though these ungodly families may flourish for a season, like a green bay tree; and though they be permitted for a while to gratify their enmity against the people of God, who have done them no harm; yea, before they are aware, the scene is reversed, some destroyer brandishes the sword of vengeance.

One fails in business, and comes to beggary, with his whole house. Another, given up to the will of his flesh, sinks miserably into the filth of sin. One must flee away branded with ignominy; and another is brought, by degenerate children, with sorrow to the grave. One is smitten with madness; another is delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh; or, overwhelmed with despair, with his impious right hand destroys himself.

The babel of worldly prosperity cracks to its very foundations; and, where the Lord breaks down, there is no building up. An evil impenitent death-that awful finishing of temporal judgments-is only the first step to that sequence of terrors which no grave can close upon. The castaways go with Judas to their place, and their names are mentioned no more upon earth, or mentioned only with abhorrence. Has anything of this kind ever happened amongst us? Answer this question for yourselves, my friends!

One thing I know, that still many a house of Jezebel exists among us, which must one day have to give an account for their mockery at true piety, and their opposition to the children of God: and that, except they repent, they will in that day judge it more tolerable for them to have been bound to a millstone and drowned in the depths of the sea, than thus to have offended God's little ones.

The third commission which was given to Elijah, must have been to him the most pleasing of all. It contained the answer to his third complaint, that he Was left alone, and they sought his life; and it was as if God had said, "Be not cast down, Elijah, thou art not the only one that is left; and, if thou wert the only one on the field of battle, thinkest thou not that I could raise up prophets when I need them?"

"Go, and anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abelmeholah, to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."

Thus a great and strong wind, that should rend the mountains and break in pieces the rocks before the Lord, is announced against backsliding Israel in the person of Hazael; an earthquake in the

person of Jehu; and, in the person of Elisha, a fire of the wrath as well as of the love of the Lord.

Elijah now sees the Keeper of Israel has not forsaken his vineyard. This instruction invigorates him in body and soul; and when, in addition to this, he hears from the Lord's mouth the surprising information that there are still seven thousand who had not bowed their knees to Baal, the gloomy cloud upon his mind is entirely dissipated, and nothing prevents him from joyfully setting out in faith to give glory to God.

My brethren, if a sword of the Lord be to pass through this congregation-and a sword will surely come-O that it may not be Hazael's or Jehu's sword, but the sword of Elisha-the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of the living God! This good sword, with which he takes the prey from the mighty, may the Lord sharpen more and more, that it may better do its office amongst us, and cut, and divide, and penetrate in a greater degree than it has hitherto done!

May it cast down the proud into the dust-drive the carnally secure from their refuges of lies-so cut away self-righteousness and so wound them that are whole, that they may resort only to Jesus for healing!

Gird then thy sword upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and by thine arrows let the people fall under thee! And may the people which are left of the sword find grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when thou goest to cause him to rest! Amen. Psalms 45:3-5. Jeremiah 31:2.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

02.15. The Hidden Church

The Hidden Church

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people,” saith the Lord by the prophet Isaiah 65:19. These words give us an insight into the love of God, which ought to draw us towards himself. We here behold the close relation which subsists between God and his people; of which indeed we should entertain conceptions far too mean, were we to compare it merely to the relation subsisting between a gracious sovereign and his pardoned criminal subjects, or between a condescending and forbearing master and his servants. We are not only objects of his sparing and pardoning mercy, we are incomparably more than this. The Lord rejoices over his people; he delighteth in them that fear him and trust in his mercy. He rests in his love toward them. He beholds them-not as they are in themselves, but as clothed with the righteousness of their Surety, and beautified with his spirit of holiness. He loves those who are renewed by his grace, even as he loves the express image of his person. For those whom he thus loves, are conformed to the image of his Son.

It has been said by someone, Suppose the sun in the heavens, which enlightens, warms, and fructifies everything, were a rational being that could see everything which it effects, it would then behold its own image in every sea, in every river, in every lake, and in every brook,-nay, it would even see itself reflected on the loftiest mountains of ice; and would it not, in the abundance of its joy at such glorious radiance- forgetting itself-embrace all these oceans, seas, and rivers-nay, the very glaciers, in its arms, and delight over them Thus Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, beholds his image and divine work in every renewed soul as in a polished mirror; hence, seeming to forget himself in the abundance of the joy that was set before him. He could condescend to wash the feet of his disciples; hence it was that he exclaimed to the Syro-Phoenician woman, “O woman, great is thy faith!”

Thus our eternal Father beholds in his children the beauty of his Son Jesus Christ, with a complacency which is more than we are able to express. He embraces them with the arms of his love; and he loves the image of himself in which he has renewed them.

Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God! Some of them are spoken of in the portion of the history now before us; and such, in all ages, may be called the hidden church.

“Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18).

These words conclude the Lord’s address to Elijah at Horeb. After announcing the heavy judgments which were to come upon backsliding Samaria, by means of Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha-this pleasing communication follows, like the still small voice. The last shadow of anxiety

was now dispelled from the prophet's mind.

This announcement of God, respecting the seven thousand faithful worshipers reserved in idolatrous Israel, may lead us,

I. To consider that God has ever a hidden church;

II. To reflect upon the promises made to it.

I. Elijah had complained that the Lord's name was forgotten,

and his covenant forsaken by the children of Israel;

and had added, that he himself was left alone His complaint was correct enough for human knowledge. The days indeed were evil; the age of Noah seemed to have returned; all was dark, dead, ruined, and desolate; and the vintage of God seemed gathered from the earth, with the exception of two or three on the topmost bough.

Painful in the extreme must all this have been to such a spirit as Elijah's; but, suddenly, he receives from God himself the astonishing tidings, that seven thousand were still reserved, who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed him. How astonished must the prophet have been at this disclosure! How ready to recall his words, "I, even I only, am left alone!" and how must his new commission have been undertaken with renewed courage!

And what could be more delightful, in this our day, than to be surprised by similar intelligence? certainly, our own age seems greatly superior to that of Elijah; but there is much that is only exterior show, which can hardly be mistaken. If all that appears to be divine life were really such; and if all were evangelists, who in modern times are preaching, not for the truth, but against it; if they were men of God, led and gifted by the Spirit of God, and bowed the knee in truth to the exalted Redeemer; if all the multitudes, who in every place crowd into the places of worship, really said in their hearts, "Come, let us return to the Lord!" If the thousands, who, in Bible and missionary associations, labor in building the ark, all came into this ark themselves-nay, if even all whom we see uniting for meetings of edification and prayer, could be regarded as true worshippers, then might we indeed say something good of our times, though much would still remain to be wished for.

But of what use is it to deceive ourselves? Things are far from being what their appearance would indicate; alas, many things which, from a distance, look very beautiful, are found, when more closely examined, to be full of deformities, if not mere phantoms of what they seemed to be.

Yet, supposing we could regard all who have the show of piety as real Christians, how few would even these be, compared with the number of those amongst us who openly show themselves to unbelievers? The prevailing spirit of our times is that of infidelity and apostasy-a spirit of pretended illumination, but, in reality, of the blindness presumption-a spirit of opposition to the plain Word of God, and of arbitrary determination upon good and evil independent of it-a spirit of the most idolatrous exaltation of mere natural reason above the revealed wisdom of God. Among the great mass of nominal Christians, both of the learned sort and of the illiterate, it has long been taken for granted that the doctrine of our native corruption is a gloomy fancy, and that of salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ an antiquated and by-gone notion.

It is held, that the miserable tinsel of exterior decorum, the mere flimsy garniture of selfishness, is quite sufficient to satisfy God; and that a Mediator is not at all necessary to the salvation of men. Many have long been agreed, that the dogmas of a few conceited philosophers, so called, are more to be trusted than the truth of God delivered by Christ and his apostles; and that such faith as that of Paul, Peter, or John, is insufferable in the present day, as being absurd, mystical, and unworthy of any maturely instructed mind-yea, that it ought to be banished from the earth, even by persecution, if no other means will suffice.

Such is the prevailing spirit of our modern Christendom, which, with some, is disguised by a Christian profession; with others, has shamelessly cast off all disguise. It is found in every district, and in all ranks of society, and is taught in by far the greater part of our schools and nurseries. Millions of men professing the name of Christ, lie at the feet of this impious lying spirit in the present day. If you travel through the country, in whatever direction, you find it discovering itself in every company, at public tables and in private families.

Go from one church to another, and you will almost everywhere find that this spirit of seduction is the teacher and expositor; inspect a multitude of our modern hymn books and catechisms, and instead of the Spirit of God, this spirit of darkness in the garb of religion will confront you; yes, and in a very large number of our places of education, this spirit is the Moloch to which our youth and children are sacrificed.

Indeed, a review of the Christian world in the present day, is enough to make every pious spirit shudder. The spirit of antichrist is prevailing in the world to such an extent as it has never done heretofore; and it is almost time to join in with the complaint of the psalmist, “Help, Lord! for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from the children of men!” (Psalms 12:1)

Surely many think far too favorably of the present times. But do not others think far too gloomily of them? We are willing to believe they do, and the experience, which Elijah had, who even thought that he only was left; and afterwards heard, to his surprise, that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, may help to confirm us in this belief. Assuredly the Lord has many servants with whom we are unacquainted, he has hidden ones whom we may never hear of in this world; and many a country, and many a city, would perhaps long ago have been as Sodom and Gomorrah, had not a small remnant of such been left in those places.

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;” for, behold, “the kingdom of God is within you.” We do not sufficiently consider this, even as Elijah did not; and therefore we may be often mistaken with reference to this kingdom.

It is not infrequently the case, my brethren, that we measure the temple of God with a very incorrect measuring-line, and therefore deceive selves as to its breadth and extent. For instance, we are apt to take it for granted, that where there arc no enlightened preachers, there can be no true Christians. But we forget that God has promised, where the shepherds are corrupt, to take charge of the flock himself!

Where has he made the regeneration of his chosen entirely dependent on human instrumentality? Lo! In the midst of the desert he often plants, with his own hand, the loveliest roses; and from the rudest and most neglected copse we often hear the sweetest notes of the nightingale. We are also apt to think, that where nothing is heard of awakenings, no awakenings take place. But must there

be always a sound when it rains, and cannot children be born to the Lord as dew from the womb of the morning-silently and secretly, before daybreak, and while multitudes are asleep?

We are apt to take it for granted, that where there is no opposition to the Gospel, there must be a dearth of decided Christians. Certainly, the words still hold good, “I am not come to send peace, but the sword!” and this is commonly shown to be the case. Still there may be real Christians, who, without living under the fear of man, go on in such a quiet, retired, and gentle way, as not to be so exposed to the rancor of the children of this world; and if the Lord say to Laban, “Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad,” Can Laban act otherwise?

It is generally taken for granted, that in certain connections, stations, and companies, for instance in the courts of infidel or worldly-minded princes, a child of God cannot possibly be found; but do we not see, in the example of a Joseph, an Obadiah and a Daniel, that even this may be the case? Obadiah seems to have possessed the confidence and regard of such a man as Ahab, one of the vilest of men.

The state of Christianity is also frequently estimated by the religious meetings convened in any place and by the numbers who attend them; but is this estimation always correct? May it not be possible, that in a place where no such meetings are held, there still may be many children of God who are restrained from coming together only by timidity and reserve-for such things may be found even in true believers-who are obliged to secrete themselves, like the seven thousand in Elijah’s days. And is it not a part of the providential guidance of many souls, to be directed rather to secret and retired intercourse with God, than to much open conference with their brethren?

Hence it may follow, that possibly in those places where no sympathy or activity exists for religious institutions as for Missionary and Bible Societies, perhaps nothing is wanting but information respecting such institutions, for the excitement of such an interest; or some sincere servants of God may have still so much to do with their own spiritual concerns, that they hardly know how to turn their attention to public efforts of this kind.

All this is possible. But it may be asked, can there be any ground for supposing a people of God to exist, where no works of pious writers are made use of; where there is no information found respecting the progress of the kingdom of God in the world; where scarcely an evangelical sermon or book is ever read or heard of? I answer, we are not sure that in such places there are no people of God.

I know some whom you would all acknowledge to be holy persons, were I to name them to you, who, nevertheless, read nothing in the world but their Bible and hymn book, and daily wipe their eyes for joy that they are so rich with these two books, and think that in these they possess a library which, in their whole life, they will never be able to exhaust, and that they can find nothing so beautiful anywhere as in the Bible! Who can blame them? Now, there may be many such persons in the world, who are very little known.

Moreover, we are apt to make the number of the faithful smaller than it is, by defining too arbitrarily and narrowly the characteristics of a state of grace. We, for instance, lay down a certain process as always observed in the Holy Spirit’s work of conversion; whereas he is free as the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Infinite wisdom is seen in an endless variety of processes in the visible creation; and, as uniformity is not its business in the kingdom of nature, so neither is it in the

kingdom of grace; but the same object is attained here also by variety.

A gracious change of mind may be as truly wrought by one process as by another. If you have had long to sigh and groan in spirit before your sins were forgiven you, still grudge not at him whose way hath been made to prosper more rapidly, and to whom the Lord has earlier shown his lovingkindness. “It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.”

Or, if it be given you to gain spiritual strength more easily, while another is day and night troubled with “a thorn in the flesh,” and cast down again and again-is he, on that account, no child of God?

If it be given you lo have much knowledge and experience, must it necessarily be given to another also; and can there be no retired and reserved children of God? And if you are active and zealous in awakening others, efficient in preaching, exhortation, &c. while others are not so, nor are able to be so, are you therefore to question the genuineness of their piety? We must never measure others by ourselves. If we seek more after the chief and essential matter, namely, the contrite spirit and the genuine love of Christ and of the brethren, we shall perhaps number many as belonging to the flock of Christ, at present we are apt to overlook.

Elijah, as we find, received an express revelation concerning the faithful in Israel, and their number. The Lord unveiled to him the hidden church, and it may be supposed how great was the astonishment of this man of God, at learning that amongst the very people he had so severely accused, there were so many as seven thousand who had not bowed the knee unto Baal.

He had regarded himself as the only light in the darkness of Samaria; and now, behold! a whole firmament of chosen souls is disclosed to his view, which the clouds of his weak faith had kept hidden from him.

We have to be thankful that even still the church is sometimes refreshed by such pleasing discoveries. Often, on the very spot where we expected to find only thorns and briers, we find a cultivation like the garden of the Lord, and sweeter flowers than are wont to bloom in the more open places of Christendom.

Thus lately, in a village in France, in the cottage of one who had been a notorious, fortune-teller, was discovered a goodly group of the lambs of Christ’s flock. So likewise there very recently found, in one of the most dissipated cities in the world, a spiritual plantation of Divine grace, which we should never have looked for in such a moral desert; and yet it had secretly flourished there for several years, known only to the heavenly Husbandman, who planted and kept it.

In another quarter, with which you yourselves are acquainted, where the voice of preaching had long been entirely silent, there was found a considerable company of thriving children of grace, secretly sprung up without any apparently efficient means, of whom the church might be ready to say, “Whence came they? And who hath begotten me these?”

And, in another place, we unexpectedly beheld, through the intervention of a pious and righteous emperor, three hundred saints, of whom almost no one knew anything, lately coming forth from the prisons of malefactors-three hundred, who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who, for that very reason, had lain in irons without the emperor’s knowledge.

God sometimes shows us (it was a happiness I frequently enjoyed in my former charge) some old pilot in the midst of a rude and ungovernable crew, who has grown gray in the midst of the most brutal associates; but behold, he is steering toward Jerusalem, and his guiding star is the star of Bethlehem; or some rough bargeman or sailor, who has grown up in the seat of the scorners! But lo! Through his rude exterior glistens the pure brightness of a genuine Christian character, and beneath his rough leathern doublet beats a heart moored by that anchor which entereth into that within the veil; and again, as has frequently happened to us, we enter a house to preach repentance towards God to some whom we suppose to be spiritually dead, and we are sweetly surprised by the greeting Christian smile of one or more in the family, betraying a secret acquaintance with the peace of God, and perhaps more deep experience in Christ than we ourselves possess.

Such discoveries serve to shame our timidity, to strengthen our faith, and enlarge our hearts; they also teach us to be more prudent and gentle in judging of others, and to take a brighter and more hopeful survey of the world at large.

Since I found among yourselves such retired blossoms of faith, my whole congregation has appeared to me in another light, and when I traverse it, I feel like one who is passing through the shaft of a mine, where one stroke of the mattock, to the right or the left, may possibly discover to him a new vein of precious metal.

Yes, however low may be the present state of the church, we have reason to conclude that it is not so poor and destitute of persons influenced by divine grace as we are ready to imagine.

I believe that if it pleased God to lift the veil, we might be surprised with the discovery of such numbers as would seem like a resurrection scene. We doubt not but the Prince of the host has still many an ambush of reserve in this world, and that he needs only to sound the trumpet, as he will do, in due time, according to Zechariah 10:8, and then we shall be surprised at beholding troops of Christians about us, as Elisha’s servant was surprised at beholding troops of angels covering the mount of Dothan. 2 Kings 6:17.

How often has it happened, that in a church where, for many years, the Word of God had seldom been heard, and of which it was a matter of doubt whether such a church contained in it one real believer, a single occasional discourse, delivered from its pulpit by a stranger, has proved the signal for calling forth, all at once, numbers of timid sheep from their state of concealment! And may not such occurrences give us reason to hope that there are yet many more of the Lord’s “hidden ones,” with whom we are unacquainted?

How surprised shall we be in eternity, when the veil shall be removed, to find there, from quarters where we least looked for them, among the multitude whom no man can number, standing before the throne, many who were never known as the Lord’s people in this world; whom circumstances, or local situation, or their outward defects and infirmities, or their retiring humility and modesty, had concealed from our view!

And not only in eternity, but also in this world, such a joyfully surprising disclosure of the hidden church awaits us-and who knows how near its time may be- that the prophetic language, in Song of Solomon 6:10, will resound as then fulfilled, “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?”

II. If we look in the day time towards heaven, we cannot see the stars of God

They are there fixed in the firmament, but the eye cannot distinguish them. Wait until evening. The night invites their rays from concealment, and in the dark you behold their gentle luster once more. So also is the firmament of the church. In the sunshine of worldly prosperity they are scarcely perceptible, and the difference between them and the better sort of the children of this world is sometimes hardly discernible.

But in this case also, have patience until evening, and their glory will light up before you. As doubtless, at the time when Hazael the Syrian broke in upon the land with fire and sword, these seven thousand in Israel were made manifest; so also, on the day of the mighty sifting which awaits the Christian world, we shall be better able rightly to measure the Lord's temple upon earth.

These days of purification are hastening on with rapid flight. There is no want of signs of the most diversified kind, which announce to us the nearness of that period in which the Lord will manifest that his fan is in his hand, and will thoroughly purge his floor. Predictions hasten to their close; and the days are approaching, in whose wild perplexity even the elect, were it possible, might be deceived.

Then, if a time should come, when the mark of the beast shall be obtruded on our foreheads at the point of the sword or bayonet, when nothing can save us from torture or a bloody death but a renunciation of Christ and his Gospel, the gold will be separated from the dross in the church, and it will be made apparent where the substance of godliness exited, and where only the appearance and tinsel of it.

Alas, how many a star, respecting which we have at present no such presentiment, will then fall from the firmament of the church; and what clouds of chaff shall we then see borne away on the wind, even from places where our eyes at present perceive nothing but rich floors of wheat!

For everything that is not from the Spirit of the Lord, will not survive the ordeal of that day; and everything which now assumes to itself the ornaments of the sanctuary, but is not clothed with them by the Lord's hand, will be seen in the shame of its own nakedness.

At the very same period, when trees "without fruit" shall fall, when multitudes of false brethren shall be severed and distinguished from the true; thousands, of whom at present we know nothing, shall throw aside the veil, and with cries of "Hosannah!" shall range under the banner of martyrs.

When no other choice will be left but between Christ and Belial, then will those who heretofore have been reserved and timid, declare themselves openly for Christ and his cause. Thousands, who in the days of comparative quiet seemed to hang down their heads, will rise like young eagles in the beclouded heavens; and the most weak and bashful in the church will be as David. Thus, one joyful phenomenon after another will surprise us in those days.

The deeper the night becomes; the more richly studded and brilliant will be the firmament of the church. The elect shall be gathered from the four winds, and come forth like a new and blooming creation; and we shall seem "like unto them that dream, when the Lord shall thus turn again the captivity of Zion," Psalms 126:1-2, and when we shall hear hosannas resounding ten thousand thousandfold from all the ends of the earth, Isaiah 52:10.

But what will most joyfully surprise us at that time, if we live to see it, is, that it will be given even to us poor timid sheep, who are now so weak in faith, to descend cheerfully, if need be, into any tribulation for Jesus' sake, and glorify God even in the fires.

What the Lord says of the seven thousand in our text, will then have reference to us: "I have reserved them to me;" and no one who belongs to the Lord will have any cause to fear. Children of God are preserved, into whatever trials they fall. Satan may sorely harass them; but they come off more than conquerors. The world may oppose and distress them, but this is all it can do. They are "reserved," and "preserved for ever."

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," said the Lord. John 16:33.

Thus, however weak in themselves; they shall survive, when the overflowing scourge shall pass through the earth, and in the last time of temptation, when the fan is purging the Lord's floor.

Be of good cheer, therefore, whoever of you are sincerely following Christ. Whatever may happen, the seed of Jacob shall be delivered, for the Almighty himself is their rock; and his church stands so firm that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!

Let the clouds then gather and forebode the storm-let Hazael and Jehu gird on their weapons! "Yet," saith the Lord, "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

In the great tribulation which shall come upon the whole earth, a church shall discover itself around us, of which as yet, we, in the weakness of our faith, have scarcely dreamed. For thus saith the Lord, Zechariah 10:9, "I will sow them among the people; and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again."

Yes, he has scattered them like grains of wheat, in all the world, that from them, under the dew of the Divine blessing, a wondrous harvest might spring. Therefore every place and every family where such living seed is deposited, though it be only a single grain, may, on that account, be already counted happy.

Who knows to what increase such a single grain may yet arrive! Certainly, it often fares with this seed as our Lord says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone" (John 12:24).

It is true, that believing parents, friends, teachers or inmates, must often themselves previously descend into the grave, and then it is that their prayer is found to have been heard; their example is remembered with powerful influence, and their admonitions recalled and laid to heart; and it is only from their ashes that vigorous plants spring forth; and it is on their tombs that the first penitential tears fall of those they leave behind.

Their labor is never in vain in the Lord, but sooner or later its fruit is found. "They that were sown," saith the Lord, "shall live, with their children, and turn again;" they shall increase and be multiplied.

We may well rejoice at such a prospect. Let us give up all narrow notions of the kingdom of God. Moreover, as the Lord knoweth them that are his, and we do not always know them, let us not

presume to judge of their number by our own knowledge. They may not be made and fashioned according to our own preconceived pattern; they may not wear the garb and cut of our own preference, and yet they may be citizens of heaven.

Only let it be remembered, that the seal to which every such citizen is conformed, is this: “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

Wherefore lay apart all gloomy and dejected thoughts that would discourage you from being steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. The everlasting preservation, final victory, and future glory of every true member of Christ’s holy church, should fill us with joy and rejoicing. “God hath set his King upon his holy hill of Zion.”

The Lord Jesus Christ shall receive the nations for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. “Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him. He shall build the temple of the Lord, and give himself no rest, until he has made Jerusalem a praise in the earth. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea; and they shall come from the east from the west, and sit down in the kingdom of God” (Isaiah 40:10; Isaiah 62:7; Isaiah 11:9; Matthew 8:11).

Seeing then that we know these things, we are courageous and look upon the world, not in the gloomy coloring of our own pusillanimity, but in the dawning light of the sun of revelation. Christ must reign, and the “mountain of the Lord’s house shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations flee unto it” (Isaiah 2:2).

Let not, then, our eyes be dimmed, nor our hearts be distressed by the mists of the present day. Faith already plants the standard of victory upon the scene of conflict: for it has respect to “the time of the end;” and, although the trophies of Satan be exalted on high in the meantime, still faith is not daunted.

It sings of the triumph of the Lord; and bears inscribed on its banner, that mighty asseveration of the Almighty:

“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow; every tongue shall swear, and say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength” (Isaiah 45:23-24).

~ end of chapter 15 ~

02.16. The Callings of Elisha

The Callings of Elisha

CHAPTER SIXTEEN The manifold wisdom of our blessed Saviour, as seen in his intercourse with sinners; the consideration he showed for different shades of character, and the peculiar readiness and propriety with which he met everyone's disposition and situation, are sufficient of themselves to evince from whence he came. We have striking instances of this in Luke 9:54-62.

In this passage we have the four principal temperaments of the mind before us: the choleric, the sanguine, the phlegmatic, and the melancholy: and we behold Christ treating each of them with consummate wisdom.

To the choleric, namely, his disciples who wished to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans, he only presents his own spirit as a contrast to it, and unfolds his compassionate intention in coming into the world; showing that it was to save men's lives, and not to destroy them. Nothing could have been more appropriate to allay irritation of the feelings, and to give them an entirely different tone, than these gracious and gentle words of the compassionate Friend of man.

Shortly after this, a man comes up to him on the road, saying to him, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest!" Here was a sanguine disposition. The man appears to have been carried away with the brilliant actions and divine lovingkindness of Jesus; and it was necessary that this flighty and enthusiastic mind should be brought to sit down and count the cost. Hence our Lord thus answers him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Another comes to our Lord, and thus addresses him, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father;" by which he appears to mean, "Allow me to remain in the house of my parents till my father dies; I will then reflect further on the subject." This man then was of a phlegmatic temperament; a person slowly excited, quiet, even and cool. Our Lord again treats this person in a wonderful manner, entirely appropriate to such a disposition. He speaks strongly, seriously, and awakingly, in order to produce an immediate and firm resolution in this procrastinating spirit, and says, "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

The Lord meets with a fourth, whom he had anticipated by saying to him, "Follow me."

He replied, "Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." Can we doubt what is the temperament of this individual?

It is the melancholy, the slowly roused, but deeply and durably susceptible; which as has been justly observed, is seldom taken by sudden surprise, but is oftener stolen upon by slow but strong affections; which is more inclined to care and sorrow, than to mirth and joy; which does not shun labor, but is wont to pursue its objects energetically. These characteristics are conspicuous in his very language to our Lord. The thing which first presents itself to his mind, is the dark and dreadful consequences of following Christ. Therefore he desires to embrace his family once more, and

perhaps, as it seems to him, for the last time.

To meet such a disposition there was need of encouraging and firm language, which might disperse the clouds of melancholy, and give the resolution to break through a host of cares. The man needed an arousing call to the standard, and such a call the Lord addresses to him, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Here then we may well admire the penetrating eye of the Searcher of hearts; the skill of the great Physician; the infinite condescension of the Prince of Peace All is equally great, glorious, and adorable.

In the last of these occurrences, a scene of Old Testament history seems evidently referred to. What the person whom Jesus called here requests for himself, is the same which Elisha requested of Elijah before he undertook to follow him; and our Lord, in the words, “He that putteth his hand to the plough,” &c, appears to have intended to refer the man to the example of Elisha, in order to excite him to a quick and cheerful determination. This example is presently to come under our consideration, in the portion of Elijah’s history at which we are now arrived.

“So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.

“And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

“And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him” (1 Kings 19:19-21).

We find Elijah, after he had departed from Horeb, arrived at Abelmeholah, in Palestine, near the river Jordan, on the estate of Elisha the son of Shaphat, commencing the accomplishment of what the Lord had commissioned him to do. He calls Elisha, and Elisha obeys the call; these are the two points which require our attention present.

I. From the solitary desert of mount Sinai, we are now to follow

the prophet back amongst the smiling lowlands of Jordan,

and to walk upon the fruitful plains which surround

the little town of Abelmeholah

We there meet with twelve husbandmen behind their ploughs; eleven of them are servants, but the twelfth is the son of a substantial landed proprietor. He is called Elisha, and his father Shaphat. He does not esteem it beneath his dignity to put his own hand to the work; he drives in the sweat of his brow, his yoke of oxen before him, in the company of his servants.

The plentiful rains which had lately descended, had made it delightful to be out in the fields, and to follow the plough. The blessing of God sensibly perfumed the air; and the fields, which for three

years and a half had been a barren wilderness, seemed now, after the refreshing showers, impatient for the seedtime, to unfold their newly derived powers. How often, perhaps, had this husbandman, as he broke up the furrows, conversed with his servants of the mighty wonders with which the Lord had of late visited their native land!

How often, perhaps, was the name of Elijah mentioned, and the fiery sign on Carmel made the subject of discussion. For they had probably been eyewitnesses of that miracle; and might belong to that seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Perhaps it was at the very time when they were thus conversing of those wonderful days that, behold! a man draws near to them, of venerable aspect, covered with a mantle, and having his loins girded as a traveler; and as he comes nearer, the oxen stand still, and the husbandmen look at each other as if they would say, “Who can this stranger be, and what brings him here?”

But who shall describe their joyful surprise, as they recognize in the solitary traveler, now approaching with quicker steps towards the son of Shaphat, the very man whose name and deeds had resounded through the whole country- Elijah the Tishbite!

The sacred historian says that he found Elisha; whether this implies that he knew him before, or whether he was enabled thus to find him, by special Divine direction given him for the purpose, we are not informed. But of this we may be certain, that Elijah had not for a long time found a more gratifying acquaintance than this. Elisha was the first child of God, whom, after a long period of solitude, he had the happiness to meet; he found in the Person of the son of Shaphat, the first and the chief of the seven thousand, and the first seal of the promise granted him at Horeb on behalf of his people.

The simple and pious Elisha was the man, in whose sphere of action the still small voice of God’s tender mercy and love would be heard by the children of Israel, so as to turn them to the Lord their God. He was the first messenger of the Lord who should sow the fruit of righteousness in peace upon the land which his predecessor had broken up by judgments; yea, who should bind up the hearts which had been broken. Even his name expressed the character of his divine commission. It signifies, “My God is salvation;” and the history of his ministry is given, as it were, in this one word. His labors, compared with those of his predecessor, appear upon the whole peculiarly evangelical.

He goes about in meekness, and his peaceful course is marked with benefits and blessings; nor is it accompanied by the dreadful majesty of divine and burning jealousy, but by the mild and amiable light of the Lord’s condescending love. He stretches out His right hand, not to close heaven, but to bring down its showers of blessing. His office is evidently that of a deliverer, sent to announce that “the Lord is gracious.”

An entirely new period was therefore to commence with Elisha’s mission; a period of divine lovingkindness, after the days of judicial punishment; a period of the “still small voice.” Elijah seemed to be aware of this; and it may be easily imagined with what delight he must have embraced Elisha, as the man who was to be instrumental in fulfilling his best hopes for Israel.

Elijah found him behind the plough. It is without meaning that this is mentioned in the history. Here then we have a pleasing picture of a man, who, notwithstanding the gifts with which he was endowed, continued lowly in his own eyes, and led a humble and unassuming life.

How many, gifted like him, would have thought themselves too good for the plough, and born to a sphere of life above that of a simple farmer; would have persuaded themselves that they must not withhold their talents from mankind, that they must go forth into the field of public labor, to enlighten and guide the world. But such thoughts did not enter the mind of Elisha. His pretensions went not beyond his plough and his husbandry; he saw his vocation in these quiet and rural occupations, and well satisfied with this, he “minded not high things.”

How much more amiable and beautiful is such a disposition than the opposite one, which is now so frequently met with among Christians! “Labor for the kingdom of God,” is become the watchword of the day; we certainly rejoice at it, but with very mingled feelings. There is too much vanity and self-complacent pushing forwards, which, alas! may be seen on this field of activity. No sooner does anyone imagine he has found himself possessed of talents and gifts ever so small, than he hesitates not to regard himself as a pillar of the church of God.

The condition and calling in which he has been hitherto, is no longer the proper one for him. He immediately begins to think, if not to talk, of a higher station, to which he imagines himself born. We ought undoubtedly to let our light shine before men; but then everyone should do so in the situation in which Providence has placed him. Nor does God intend, by this command to let our light shine before men, to refer simply to the office of the ministry, or to any official teaching in his church. It is not merely thy lips, Christian, but thy life, which is to be the lamp. It is thy general character and conduct which are to edify thy brother and glorify God.

He intends that all thy thoughts, words, and works should silently testify that thou art born of God, and that the peace of God rules in thy heart. Then it is that thou throwest around thee that gracious radiance which the Saviour means when he bids thee let thy light shine before men; then it is that thou preachest the Gospel, as the power of God unto salvation, more effectually than can be done by thy words.

And remember that those spiritual lights have the purest radiance which are the least conscious of their own brightness; and that those divine flowers diffuse the sweetest fragrance which make the least display.

That excessive pressing of religious men into public notice, which characterizes the present day, is only another sign of the spiritual poverty of the times. There is a great dearth of truly great and noble spirits in our modern Christendom. No eagle pinions at present soar in our firmament; hence the smaller birds, the minds of inferior cast, having no living standard by which to discern their own littleness, are emboldened to regard their own modicum of talents and endowments as an evidence of a divine vocation to great and exalted things.

Happy would it be for Zion were that vain activity, which is not of God but of the world, confined to the world itself, and not obtruded within her sacred enclosures. Happy would it be for her people, were there not so mournfully prevalent among them an idolatry of worldly instrumentality and mere human talents! Why is it that God so frequently calls home his most excellent servants and evangelists, in the bloom of life, from their useful labors, but-as one purpose at least-to secure them from the peril of that idolatrous admiration with which these mortals are wont to be extolled, in what are called the religious periodicals; and to let the survivors know, that the pillars of the temple are not flesh; that wisdom does not die with any creature; and that none but Himself is the

basis, the support, and the builder up of his kingdom.

When Elijah has found Elisha, he takes his prophet's mantle from off his own shoulders, and throws it over those of the son of Shaphat, without speaking a word. What must have been the feelings of the plain and unassuming husbandman upon this occasion! for he well understood this significant action, and could view it as nothing less than a consecration to the prophetic office, and a call to be the assistant, follower, and representative of the Tishbite.

It is to be lamented, that, in the present day, the Christian ministry is too exclusively and systematically confined to persons who have undergone a certain mode of education; which was never the case with the church in its purest times.

May God raise up and put forth amongst us more of those who are taught rather by the unction of the Spirit of God, than by the mere external apparatus of scientific institutions! Not that these are to be despised or neglected; far from it! but they furnish, after all, only the exterior of a Christian minster's qualifications.

After Elijah had cast his mantle over his successor, he went away without uttering a word; and this he appears to have done to render more impressive the meaning of his symbolical action.

Elisha well understood it. He lays the reins on the necks of his oxen, leaves them standing with the plough in the midst of the field, and hastens after the man of God. We do not find that he either resisted the call with a variety of objections, or made many words about the too great honor done him, or about his own incapacity for the office; no, the matter was briefly and speedily settled.

He thought not about himself, but about the heavenly Caller, and his power and grace. He leaves in God's hands the dignity and burden of his office, and receives the prophetic commission with the same equanimity as he had taken in hand the plough or the mattock. O lovely simplicity, and serenity of a humble and child-like spirit!

Elisha, however, had more to leave than his team and field. His father and mother were living, and them he felt bound, first of all, to inform of his high calling, and to desire their prayers and parental blessing. Accordingly he runs after Elijah, and requests of him a short interval, saying, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee!"

How very differently does the son of Shaphat begin his prophetic career from what is related of Elijah! Him we find descending from the mountains of Gilead, as if he had come from another world; and his first prophetic utterance is that of a delegate of Omnipotence: - "As the Lord, the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

His family connections are concealed from us. Not a word is mentioned of his father and his mother, nor is there any where an allusion to his genealogy or relationship. The softer feelings of domestic alliances seem shaded by the experience of his elevated soul, and he steps forth, gigantically conspicuous above his age and generation. There is an imposing majesty in his whole character, which keeps everything about him, as it were, at a distance; he is like Sinai itself with its bounds set round about the mount.

Elisha's character is quite of another kind, and in the circumstances of his coming forth into public notice, he appears as any other man. The sacred history conducts us to his house and family. We are made acquainted with his occupation and connections. We behold him at his plough as a common husbandman, as one whose feelings and experience are much the same as our own; who participates in all our relative circumstances; who, like ourselves, is closely allied by blood, affection, and tenderness, to the circle in which he lives; who is a stranger to none of the sensibilities of our common nature; who can feel the pain of separation and taking leave of friends; and in whose bosom beats, in every respect, the heart of an ordinary member of the family circle. We can venture familiarly to approach him, and we feel our hearts gained to him in so doing. Now, all this was suited for the official character which Elisha was to sustain in Israel.

While Elijah was as another Moses, a vindicator of the Divine holiness, and an ambassador of divine wrath against all who violate his law, and therefore appeared as he did; Elisha, on the contrary, was appointed as an evangelist and representative of the Lord's lovingkindness, and was to shine before men in a very different light, not to threaten and terrify, but to allure persuade, and convert. Hence God sent him to the tabernacles of his brethren as one of themselves, and stationed him as a friend, in whom the most timid might feel confidence, and whose humane and affable intercourse might operate benignly on the minds of men.

Elisha shows himself to have been a beloved and affectionate son; and we at once feel our hearts drawn out towards any one in whom we perceive such features of character. Partings in some respect like that which Elisha had now to undergo, but far more bitter and painful, are those which take place when a love to Christ in one part of a family, and an opposite feeling in the other, divides and causes variance between parent and child, brother and brother, friend and friend. What is every real conversion but a virtual taking leave of worldly connections-a hastening away out of their spiritual atmosphere-a withdrawing from the jurisdiction of their thoughts, opinions, and influence, into a different, and, to them, strange and distant province.

Though such a separation is a most felicitous one for those who renounce the course of this world, still it has its pain and bitterness; for, alas, it is uncertain whether he who forsakes all for Christ, may not now have become separated forever from those who are dear to him by nature's ties, and may not have to miss them in heaven; and what a painful thought is this!

He who has never experienced such parting pangs, either does not naturally love his worldly connections, or else he is not yet effectually separated from them; and though in his exterior religious habits he may be different from them, he is not really so in the dispositions of his heart.

It happens occasionally, that this spiritual parting takes place with much anger and strife; not only on the part of those that remain behind- who can be surprised at this?-but even of those who, as they say, are desirous of leaving the world. It seems to me, however, that it is incomparably more in accordance with the nature of a true conversion, that the separation take place, on the part of the converted, with affectionate regrets, as in Elisha's case; and I confess that where I see anything else, it wounds me like an arrow, and so contracts my heart towards a new brother, that I can-not ardently welcome him.

I have seen many a soul turn from the world and come to the Lord; but oh! what separations were they, when the persons were in true earnest about their conversion It was just as if their first love

now filled their very hearts to the brim: “O that my dear father, or my dear mother, would but accompany me! O that my brother, or my friend, would choose the same good part!”

How tenderly did they entreat them to be reconciled unto God! What anxiety to perceive any traces of the work of grace in their dear Relatives! What inward sighs and supplications. “O Lord, be merciful to them also, and save their souls, as thou hast done mine!”

Everyone must be counted happy, whom the hand of mercy leads forth from the multitudes of the blind and dead into the kingdom of light; but more happy is he, who, when God awakens him, needs not to bid farewell to his dearest friends on earth, but can say to them, “You went before me; I am now, by Godd’s grace, following after you. My name is inscribed with yours in the same book of life, and your Lord and Master is now mine!”

O what a blessed welcoming; and embracing then commences! They were once divided, but are now united forever! O ye converted parents of unconverted children, ye believing children of unbelieving fathers or mothers, O that such a joyful day may soon dawn upon your dwellings!

Elijah had no objection to Elisha’s request. “Go,” said he, “and return again, for what have I done to thee?”

The natural endearments of his paternal roof would not be found any temptation to him, for the Lord himself had stirred him up; and what had Elijah done to him, except to communicate the outward and visible signs? Family connections have often stood in the way of many a converted person, but Elisha’s father and mother evidently appear to have been no such hindrance to him. They were probably devout and pious persons.

And though it required no little self-denial to give up a faithful and affectionate son, perhaps their only son, the joy and prop of their old age, especially with considerable danger of his falling a sacrifice to the idolatrous hand of power, still they readily complied, and doubtless said, “The will of the Lord be done.”

While Elijah was proceeding on his way towards the wilderness of Damascus, Elisha went and took a yoke of oxen, probably those he had been accustomed to drive, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat.

This action appears significant, as if Elisha hereby meant to seal his covenant with the Lord, to take a solemn leave of his previous station, life, and occupation; and to testify his entire and voluntary resignation and dedication of himself to God, who had called him to his office. A similar procedure must spiritually take place in our house and in our hearts, if we desire to enter into life.

“He that forsaketh not all that he hath,” says Jesus, “cannot be my disciple.”

Whatever thou lovest out of him, or more than him, must be given up.

- Is mammon thy idol? Renounce it, otherwise Satan holds thee by a golden chain.

- Is it credit and reputation among men? Away with it, and seek the honor which cometh from God only.

- Is it wisdom and understanding? Renounce them, and become a fool for Christ’s sake.

- Is it a life of ease, fashion, or pleasure? Burst these silken but slavish bonds, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.

We cannot be God's people unless we are so entirely, with all that we have and are.

But this is not all. The very instruments of the oxen must be given up, the very garments spotted by the flesh must be hated; every weight, every besetting encumbrance must be laid aside and hewn in pieces.

A whole and entire sacrifice is what the Lord desires for his altar; and his watchmen cry, "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord!" (Isaiah 52:11)

The parting meal with which Elisha now entertained the people, while on the one hand it was hospitable and cheerful, had in it, on the other hand, something solemn and sacred. Elisha, as the ruler of the feast, seems willing to leave with them his parting blessing, in a manner best suited to give them a cheerful idea of the Lord's service.

It may be imagined how Elisha felt upon this occasion. The mysterious memento which Elijah had left with him, and his own consciousness of the prophetic call, had put His mind upon the stretch.

However dear to him were his beloved parents and connections, he embraces them, and leaves them.

As to his future provision for this world, he casts all his care upon the God who feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies of the field.

Thus he sets out with a light heart and a cheerful countenance. "He arose and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

In like manner must we all be ready to follow the Lord Jesus. He has cast upon us his mantle. If we are his disciples indeed, our hearts are so touched and animated by his Spirit, that we can prefer nothing in the world before him, nor can we suffer any other object to rival him in our hearts.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

02.17. Naboth's Vineyard

Naboth’s Vineyard CHAPTER SEVENTEEN A woman of Canaan is mentioned, in the New Testament, as remarkable for her humble acknowledgment of unworthiness, and for the greatness of her faith in Christ (Matthew 15:21-28). The conduct of another woman of Canaan, Jezebel, will be noticed in the portion of sacred history before us, who was of a very different spirit. The latter was of the mighty and noble of this world: the former had no pretensions of that kind. Consider, as we proceed, which of these two persons was the happiest, and which is the happiest now!

“And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel” (1 Kings 21:17-21).

About the time when Elijah called Elisha from the plough, and consecrated him to be a prophet, a terrible war broke out between Syria and Israel. The Syrian king, Benhadad, with an enormous host, which was aided by thirty-two tributary allies, took the field, quite unexpectedly against Ahab, but by God’s help he was defeated and compelled to terms of peace.

Where Elijah abode during these tumultuous times we are not informed. It is only after the disturbances are over that we find him reappearing in the narrative, and this as an ambassador of God. He was sent to Samaria, to reprove king Ahab for his sin. This mission of Elijah is the subject of our present consideration.

We will notice, I. Its occasion;

II. Its object;

III. Its immediate consequences

I. “The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,

Arise, go down to meet Ahab of Israel, which is in Samaria:

behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is

gone down to possess it” The crime which Ahab had committed against Naboth was the occasion of the prophet’s present mission to him. We are already acquainted with king Ahab, the weak instrument of others, who always suffered himself to be governed by circumstances; and just what these made of him, such was he. Thus at one time he could show himself even kind and generous; as in his behavior to the vanquished Syrian monarch, so that a prophet was even

commissioned to reprove him for his ill-timed lenity. “Because thou hast let go out thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people” (1 Kings 20:42).

He could also, the very next moment, according as he was externally wrought upon, perpetrate the most infamous cruelties, especially when it could be done without endangering his person.

Under better influence, Ahab would probably have been a better king; but, led as he was by such a woman as Jezebel, and by such a host of sycophants as his court was composed of, he necessarily became the very tool of iniquity.

As he was very effeminate and luxurious, he left the affairs of his government, in a great measure, to Jezebel his wife, and was glad when he could pursue his pleasures with undisturbed ease. After the war was finished he had retired to his country residence at Jezreel. To pass away the time, he amused himself with beautifying and enlarging his sumptuous palace and gardens.

Adjoining the latter was a vineyard, which belonged to the paternal inheritance of Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab having thought that his grounds would be much improved by the addition of this piece of land, set his heart on obtaining, it. Accordingly he sent for the proprietor, told him his wishes, and offered him either an exchange of land, or the value of it in money.

But Naboth could properly part with his vineyard, because, by the law of Moses, no Israelite was permitted to sell his inheritance. All land was to be considered as the Lord’s property, and held only as a fief under him. It was indeed allowed to be exchanged, but even then it was to be restored in the year of jubilee. This was the Divine command, and Naboth would not deviate from it, nor would he make an exchange, because he foresaw that the idolatrous king would pay no regard to the year of jubilee, or the laws respecting it. Therefore he answered, “The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.”

He was not afraid of confronting the idolatrous monarch as a worshipper of the God of Abraham; and we rejoice to see here another individual of that seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

The king was not prepared for such a refusal as this.

He could not endure to have his favorite plans frustrated, and especially by one who pertinaciously, as it seemed to him, and in despite of his royal authority, adhered to the ancient law, and refused homage to the Sidonian idol. Wounded in his pride and dignity by this supposed insult, he hastens to his palace, behaves like a spoiled child whose will has been resisted, throws himself upon his bed, turns his face to the wall, and refuses to eat.

Jezebel, astonished at finding him in this disconsolate situation, inquires what has happened, and learns from him the whole affair. Her reply to him is that of a resolutely unprincipled, despotic, and abandoned woman: “Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

As if she had said, “Is that all that troubles thee? We will soon finish this matter. What kind of a government would it be in Israel, if such things were permitted!” Thus, partly to revenge the insult which the king’s majesty had sustained, and partly to attach her husband still more closely to

herself, she takes measures immediately to procure the vineyard at any price.

She writes letters in Ahab's name, to which she misapplies the royal seal; she orders the elders and nobles of the town to proclaim a fast, which was wont to be done when any great calamity had occurred or any dreadful crime been committed. She requires them to assemble the people, to put Naboth upon a mock trial before them, and suborn two villains to give false evidence against him, and accuse him of having uttered blasphemies and curses against God and the King.

This being done, Naboth was condemned unheard, dragged out of the town, and cruelly stoned to death. And when the bloody execution was accomplished, Jezebel went triumphantly to Ahab, and said, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, the miserable man rose up from his melancholy and chagrin, "to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it."

Behold, such was the atrocious crime, primarily, of Jezebel; but Ahab equally participated in it, since he heartily approved of the infamous deed, and readily seized the property. Indeed he would probably have contrived and perpetrated the deed itself, had he been possessed of that resolution and cunning for which his wife was so remarkable. They were both of them the murderers of Naboth, both defiled with his blood, both guilty, and equally deserving punishment.

This atrocity was the more horrible and flagitious, because it was certainly not obstinacy which induced the unfortunate man to reject the king's offer, but faith in the God of his fathers, and obedience to his holy ordinances. But there is no doubt, as we have already observed, that this very circumstance exasperated the murderers still more, yea enraged them to the highest degree. Worldlings can least of all bear to have anything refused them upon grounds of piety and faith.

Thus an unbelieving master has often required a pious servant, or laborer, to join in some dishonest plan in trade or business; and when the latter has refused, the thing would often have been taken no notice of, if the servant had only assigned some worldly reason for his refusal, such as the danger of adulterating goods in such a manner, or the injury it might cause to the master, and the like.

But when persons in this situation have referred to the will of their Saviour, and mentioned the law of God as the reason of their refusal, cursing and reviling have been the consequence, and they have been threatened with dismissal from service, or a discontinuance of employment; and though matters were not carried to the length of a stoning to death, yet, virtually and in principle, Ahab and Jezebel were there on the one side, and Naboth on the other.

But Ahab's wicked pleasure at taking possession of Naboth's estate was not of long duration, However secretly the murderers had acted their part and devised their infernal plan, One, of whose presence they thought not, had seen and noticed all.

This secret witness was no other than He, whose eyes are as a flame of fire; the Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; the Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, who understandeth its thought afar off; who is about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways. Surely he had seen it, and had prepared for them the instruments of death, and ordained his arrows against the persecutors.

But why, when the Almighty saw the impious deed devising, did he not interpose to prevent it? Why did he not rescue innocent Naboth, who was his servant and his child, and brought into peril by his faith and obedience? For replies to such questions as these, the Scripture refers us to the world to come. Till that arrive, we must silently and resignedly submit to the many mysterious disposals which occur in God's government of the world.

We must often, in opposition to appearances and short-sighted reason, rely solely on the sure word of prophecy, by faith give God the glory, and knowledge that even what appears to the carnal mind foolishness, is in reality adorable wisdom; and that what is apparently contradictory in the divine government, is part of an economy and plan which will eventually call forth our profoundest admiration.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are infinitely higher than our ways. "We do not understand his mode of government," says an enlightened writer, "and are always liable to run into mistakes, both when we commend and when we find fault with it." God has infinite complacency in his own designs, and is infinitely above all the opinions of men.

"It is really absurd," says the same author, "to wish for a hair more or less than we possess; and it is certainly better to be Elisha than Absalom; better to be as Lazarus at the rich man's gate, full of sores, than to be the rich man himself." Let the earth be what it will to us; provided God reign in it, or rather in our own hearts, his ways will ever be well pleasing in our sight.

It is certainly true, that the permission of such an event as the death of an innocent man like Naboth, under circumstances of the most despotic cruelty, is sufficient to put our faith upon exercise, and to stagger the judgment of natural reason. But events of this description will all be satisfactorily explained in eternity. Let us leave them to the Lord: he will solve every such difficulty hereafter, to his own glory and his people's happiness. We may be quite sure that it was with no discontent or complaint against divine providence, that Naboth, just after he had closed his eyes upon this world, amid volleys of stones, opened them before the throne of God.

And doubtless his cruel death is, to this moment, a subject of praise with his spirit; and could he now converse with us, any dissatisfaction on our part at God's providence towards him would give him pain, and he would call upon us to join him in adoring that providence as full of wisdom and love.

This you may allow to be true; but still you are ready to ask, what becomes of the promises of God, when it can fare so ill with such a man as Naboth? I answer, the promises of God are still what they ever were; "They are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus." God has promised to them that love him, that all things shall work together for their good and so it really happens. He has promised to be with them in fire and water; and he is with them. But you seem to assume that the promise if neither fire nor water shall come nigh them, nor any pain or mishap befall them; but this is not correct. It is, on the contrary, expressly said, that the way to the kingdom of God is "through tribulation;" and the Saviour does not conceal it from his friends, that he appoints unto them the kingdom, even as his Father hath appointed it to him (Luke 22:29). "But if this be so," you may be tempted to say, "we must be in continual anxiety, and cannot be certain of escaping any danger.

- If we travel in a lonely place, we are certain that robbers and murderers will not have their will of us.

- If we cross a river, or the sea, we have no certainty that we shall not be drowned.

- If we are deprived of work or wages, we have nothing to assure us that God will preserve us and our families from starvation.

- If the pestilence rage around us, we have no assurance that the destroying angel will pass over our houses.

There are, then, no promises to secure our preservation from calamities; so that, though we are God's children, we must be subject to the same apprehensions as those who are strangers to the covenant of promise!"

No, my friends, such conclusions are erroneous. It is certainly not unconditionally promised us that we shall escape every danger and misfortune; but he that believes shall see the salvation of the Lord; and all things are possible to him.

You know that great assurances are given us- assurances of unlimited extent-promises which leave us nothing to wish for. Whatever may be the distress by which we are threatened, we need only "call upon the name of the Lord," according to his express declaration, and we shall be delivered. Nay, the Saviour has said, in John 15:7, that inasmuch as we abide in him, we may ask what we will, and it shall be granted us.

But what is it to abide in Jesus? It is indeed a great and important matter, which is pointed out to us by this expression. For if I really abide in Christ, then I forget myself; I behold myself in Christ, and the evil conscience of sin is lost in that of his merits. I consider myself as dead with him, risen with him, and exalted with him above the world, sin, and death. I rejoice in his righteousness as my own. I feel assured that God neither can nor will deny me, as his child, and well-pleasing to himself in the Son of his love, anything that is good for me.

Nothing any longer prevents me from joyfully casting myself, with all my concerns, upon the tender and paternal heart of God. Thus, there may certainly be a life free from care and fear, even in the midst of a thousand dangers; there is a state of mind, in which we have in our hands a key to all the treasures of God, as well as a shield against every danger both of body and soul. Only learn the happy art of be being in Christ, and of asking in his name, then ask what thou wilt; for, whilst praying, thou hast thy petition.

But to return to our history. The black deed at Jezreel has been perpetrated. Naboth lies buried under the earth; but the voice of his blood cries to heaven for vengeance. The great Advocate and blood-avenger of his church hears it, and prepares for judgment. He gives to his servant the Tishbite a commission to king Ahab: "Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

Dreadful message! One would think Elijah himself must have shuddered at delivering it; nay, he must himself have sunk under such a knowledge as he had of the righteous judgments of God, had he known nothing of the grace of the Gospel. But he knew much of this, by his own experience, as is evident by attentively considering his history and character; and this rendered him undaunted and of good courage.

III. The king of Samaria is gratifying the lusts of his heart

in the vineyard of Naboth

He exults over the valuable plunder, and is considering how this acquisition may be turned to the best advantage, and united with his grounds. But suddenly he hears footsteps behind him, and turning about beholds, to his amazement, a man approaching him, in whose stead he would rather have seen a whole army marching against him, and who had never come upon him more unseasonably than just at this moment. It was Elijah the Tishbite. The prophet had sent no one before him to announce his approach, or inquire whether it is the king's pleasure to admit him into his presence.

He assumes his rightful prerogative of speaking in the name of the Lord, and makes no scruple of surprising the monarch in the midst of his pleasure-grounds and gardens. Dreadful must such a meeting have been to Ahab. He had probably vainly hoped that Jezebel had frightened away this unwelcome guest forever. He had thought him far enough away beyond the mountains; if not, which he would vastly have preferred, in his grave. But lo, he stands before him like an apparition from another world; nay, like the ghost of the murdered Naboth. Anticipating but too truly his message, he exclaims, before a word is uttered from Elijah, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Thus his own fury and malignity betray him, and become his own accusers.

How commonly, my brethren, is it the lot of your ministers to be treated like Elijah, when they succeed in finding out sinners in the church; or rather, when, by their instrumentality, sinners are found of God!

Yes, when our arrows hit the mark-when one and another of our hearers is compelled, against his will, to see his moral deformities in the mirror we place before his eyes-then it is immediately said to us, in the hearts of those that are thus smitten, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?"

We are then regarded as disturbers of men's peace, and as taking a malicious pleasure in distressing their minds. As for charity, we are accused as strangers to it, and gloomy views of enthusiasm are the things we are charged with preaching and teaching. Our sermons are considered as unsound and extravagant. Such are the heavy charges which we are obliged to put up with; but sometimes mere hard words are not deemed sufficient and the criticism becomes of a more active kind.

These individuals seek to repay us for venturing to promote, in the only right way, their peace of mind, by resolving never to hear us again, but to go in future elsewhere. Go, then, ye stricken deer, whithersoever it pleases you. It is not we that have "found" you, but it is God who has found you by our means, and from him you cannot escape. His word has pierced to the joints and marrow, and what avails it to endeavor to get rid of it again, until the same Almighty hand which pierced you shall heal the wound.

If he is leading you to repentance, spare yourselves the fruitless labor of kicking against the pricks. No means you resort to of this world's devising will be effectual to heal the wound that is rankling in your conscience. The burning in your heart will only increase from day to day, till it is quenched in the blood of the Lamb. O that we might but "find" you effectually, we would gladly submit for a while to be treated by you as enemies.

“I have found thee!” said Elijah, serene and undaunted. How must the criminal have felt at these words? Confused and oppressed by the dreadful accusations of his conscience, he saw himself utterly unable to offer the smallest defense against the denunciation of the prophet. Besides, it had come upon him like a thunder clap, especially as it had found him in Naboth’s vineyard itself, where the prophet could appeal to the very stones of the vineyard to cry out and awaken the king’s conscience.

Truly it was a pitiable position which the king of Samaria occupied at this moment. He had, probably, never before experienced such a disgraceful defeat. The glory of his regal crown has vanished in an instant.

He stands before the messenger of God as a poor perplexed delinquent, out of whose hands every weapon has been wrested; nothing now was left to him but his own stifled and impotent rage; and it must have been painful to the Tishbite himself, to see his sovereign thus overpowered, confused, and abased before him. Thus the Lord is able with a word to bring down the pride of the haughty.

Who can resist the appalling power of that word, “I have found thee,” when it comes as the language of the holy law, by which is the knowledge of sin, but not of mercy? May everyone of us feel it, if we have not felt it hitherto; but may it he accompanied by the gracious tidings of forgiveness and justification by faith in the atonement of the Son of God!

Yes: with the dreadful sentence, “Cursed is everyone that continued, not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them,” may the blessed announcement be heard in our inmost souls, that Christ is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth;” and that “whosoever believeth in him hath eternal life.”

If we hear believingly the one announcement, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;” May we hear believingly the other announcement, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!” Then shall the “fearful looking for of judgment” be exchanged for that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of;” and the terrors of the law shall give place to that inner contrition, which not only God will not despise, but which is the work of his own hands, the first sign of a new and endless life.

It is not the terror of the Divine holiness, but the manifestation of the love of God towards us in Christ Jesus, which softens the heart and renews the soul. By this the believer is more and more divested of self, becomes the willing servant of the Lord, and finds his service perfect freedom. He now loves God, and serves him; not in the slavish bondage of fear, much less in the vain endeavor to serve two masters; but from the constraining influence of gratitude; even as Paul could say, “The love of Christ constraineth us.”

He performs that which is good, as it were spontaneously, from a vital principle within. Here is an instance wherein, as we may say, liberty and necessity are closely allied to each other. The true believer becomes a captive of love, and yet in this captivity he enjoys the only true liberty.

Such are the happy effects of the Gospel of peace.

The law worketh no such wonders as these. Only where love and grace reign, are the true springs of life and salvation to be found. Only yield yourselves up to the influence of this grace and love,

and you will inhale, with every breath, the powers of the world to come, and will be elevated in spirit above the love of the world, and of the things of the world, as if a thousand hands were conducting and welcoming you into the heavenly places!

~ end of chapter 17 ~

02.18. Ahab's Repentance

Ahab’s Repentance CHAPTER EIGHTEEN The Scripture repeatedly speaks of A BOOK OF LIFE; and Paul notices, Php 4:3, the names of his fellow laborer Clement and others, as inscribed in that book. It is, as its title imports, a book of life. No judgments are written in it; no sentences of death are recorded. It is full of the promise of life eternal; and they whose names are written in it never die; they have already passed from death into life; everlasting youth awaits them beyond the grave; and thrones of never-fading glory and joy stand prepared for them in heaven. This book is, in other words, the paternal heart of our almighty and most merciful Father.

In this book a number of names are inscribed; that is, a great multitude, which no man can number, are all individually and continually remembered before him; and everyone of them is infinitely dear to him, and eternally beloved. They are the names of his people, his chosen, his children, his heirs, being joint-heirs with Christ; and redeemed to himself by the blood of the Lamb. By a mystical union with Christ their Surety, they are bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord their God. In him, the Beloved, are they made accepted and glorious; and because he lives, they also live forever and ever.

The book of life is open in heaven. There it is read again and again, and they who read it are never weary of so doing. The Son of man himself sees in it the “travail of his soul, and is satisfied.” This book indicates to the Shepherd his sheep, to the Bridegroom his bride, to the High Priest his redeemed, and to the Prince of peace the people in whose heart is his law. Even to the holy angels is this book opened. They are sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs to salvation; for which purpose they must know the names that are written in this book. And continually are they becoming more and more acquainted with it, and they increasingly wonder and adore the God of all grace, as they behold the names of those whose sins have been many, and are forgiven.

Now, if there be any one object in the world more worthy of our curiosity than another, I think we shall all agree in saying what it is: surely it is the sight of our own names inscribed there. On the fact, whether our names shall be found there or not, is suspended our peace and happiness throughout eternity. But can this fact be ascertained here on earth? I answer, that even here on earth we may know from Scripture the characteristics of those whose names are in the book of life.

The chief of these is a contrite heart, longing after God. It must never be forgotten that there are two ways of crying for mercy, and it is not every kind of humiliation before the Lord which will justify us in concluding that our names are inscribed in his book. But if we seriously desire to know what it is which distinguishes true and gracious humiliation from that which is only the working of natural feelings, we may learn it very clearly from the portion of sacred history which we are now to consider.

“Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, And will make thine house

like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin.

“And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

“And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house” (1 Kings 21:21-29). The prophet delivers his message in Naboth’s vineyard, and announces to the trembling tyrant, with all boldness, the dreadful punishments which should come upon himself and his family. Here then let us consider the impression which this announcement made upon the guilty monarch; noticing, I. How Ahab’s repentance was called forth;

II. What kind of repentance it was;

III. What were its consequences.

I. Elijah’s address evidently produced unusual terror

in Ahab’s mind, and induced him to humble

himself in some degree before God Nor does this surprise us: for it contained not only an awful aeration which Ahab could not deny, but likewise an awful sentence upon himself and his posterity, pronounced, as from the mouth of God himself, with singular impressiveness and power.

A threefold crime is here laid to the charge of the king of Israel:

- That he had provoked God to anger;

- That he had made Israel to sin;

- That he had sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord.

It was for this cause that the sword of the Almighty had been whetted for the destruction of himself and his house.

Observe, then, how The Lord represented in the first part of the accusation, as a God who may be so provoked by continued insults and rebellions, that his longsuffering, like a bended bow, needs only to be drawn to a certain tension in order to break. This certainly sounds very human; but faith is far from stumbling at such language; for it stands in need of such representations of God. We need to be told of God in an intelligible manner, and to be addressed by him in the language of our nature; in expressions of mercy, sympathy, and displeasure; as caring for us; as taking cognizance of our very thoughts; as loving us; not as inaccessible to us, or unconcerned about us.

Now just such is the God of the Scriptures.

Ahab is here further accused, of having made Israel to sin. This he had done by his impious example, and by those infamous decrees which had made the worship of Baal the religion of the state, and exposed the true worshippers of the Lord to the most cruel persecutions. Woe unto those, who, like Ahab; not satisfied with destroying themselves, seek to infect others with their pestilential errors, and to carry them along with them in their own fall!

Such men will not only have to bear their own burden, properly so called, but the guilt besides of all those unhappy victims who were led away by them, and who will pursue them forever with their vindictive execration. Such men will have hereafter the horrid distinction which their lives seem to be aiming at in this world-the distinction of being more like their father the devil, in whose works they have been so preeminent.

The remaining point of crimination which Elijah alleged against Ahab was, that he had sold himself “to work evil in the sight of the Lord.” And “there was none,” says the sacred historian, in another place, “like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.” “Sold himself to work evil!” What a dreadful charge! Yet it is as true as it is dreadful, not only concerning Ahab, but concerning every unconverted man.

“I am carnal,” saith Paul, “sold under sin;” he means in reference to his natural condition; “for that which do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; for what I hate, that do I.”

Try, my brethren, an experiment, if you please, only for one day, with the law of God; labor to keep fully any one single command of God; and however it may grieve you, depend on it that, before evening, you will be obliged to take up for yourself the same humiliating confession with the great apostle.

It is a common proverb, whether true or not, that “Every man has his price;” that there is something for which everyone will be found willing to sell himself. These are words of awful import spiritually understood; and yet in this acceptation they are but too true concerning every natural man.

The children of this world, proud as they are of themselves, may always be bought with one temptation or another: honors, profits, pleasures of one class or another, will induce them to debase themselves more and more. The idol to which Ahab sacrificed was his affection for Jezebel. His own will, his honor, his peace of conscience, the salvation of his soul, the favor of God-all that he had or hoped for was laid at this idol’s feet.

Would that he were singular in such infatuation or only one of a few! But alas, it is common in every age. Let anyone ask himself, why he is an unbeliever; why he despises the people of God, why be serves the world and the devil, and endeavors to stifle every good conviction. By what influence is he constrained thus to act? Ask him, and he will tell you that he feels the influence of custom and example, and of his own natural inclinations; that his connections, the favor of men, or the attachment by which he is bound to other persons and other things, are the causes which indispose him to the serious care of his immortal soul. But what impious constraints are these!

What an accursed alliance, though it be under the sacred name of friendship itself, must that be, which is connected with enmity against God? Whoever of us has hitherto walked in these human chains, let him extricate or rend himself from them without delay. “If any man love the world, the

love of the Father is not in him." "He that loveth father or mother, or son, or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me." Forget not the blessing of Moses upon Levi: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant: they shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifices upon thine altar" (Deuteronomy 33:9-10. "Ye are bought with a price," says the apostle; therefore "be ye not the servants of men!"

The heavy accusations which Elijah, in the Lord's name, brought against the king of Israel in the vineyard of Naboth, must have been the more terrific on account of those dreadful denunciations with which they were followed.

The first of these was, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine!" And so it came to pass, as is most strikingly shown in the subsequent history. For Ahab, though he had taken every precaution to secure himself in the battle which he stirred up against the Syrians, Was slain by an arrow shot at a venture, and the blood of his wound ran into the midst of the royal chariot which was afterwards washed in the pool of Samaria, the very place where Naboth was murdered; and there they washed his armor; so that the dogs of the city might easily have licked up his blood upon the very spot of the murder, as no doubt they did. Verily there is a God that judgeth! Have mercy upon us, O Lord Jesus!

The next "curse of the Lord" was "upon the house of" Ahab.

"Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field the fowls of the air shall eat."

How awful is it, when the iniquities of fathers are visited upon their children to the third and fourth generation! Nor did any part of the threatening fail of its accomplishment as you may see by consulting the 9th and 10th chapters of the Second book of Kings. Jehu was raised up by providence to put the Divine sentence in execution. Him God caused, by a prophet, to be anointed king over Israel, and Jehu lost no time in bringing the kingdom under his authority, but directed his first march to Jezreel, where king Joram the son of Ahab resided. Joram, perceiving his approach went out in his chariot to meet him; and, having met him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite, he asked, "Is it peace?" To whom Jehu replied, "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?"

Joram, hearing this, endeavored to escape; but Jehu drew a bow with all his strength, and smote Joram between his arms, so that the arrow went out at his heart, and sank down in his chariot. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, "Take up and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth both the Jezreelite, according to the word of Lord." And it was done. There Ahab's blood flowed, according to the letter of the divine threatening, from the veins of his son, upon the same ground which had been polluted by the blood of the innocent Naboth. In the same manner were Joram's sons and all the relatives of Ahab extirpated by the sword, so that neither root nor branch remained of that idolatrous house.

The idol priests met with the same fate. In one day they were all slain by the sword; the images, together with the house of Baal in Samaria, were broken to pieces, and idolatry for a season was banished out of Israel.

The third judgment which Elijah announced to Ahab was to fall upon Jezebel. “The dogs,” said he, “shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.” And so it came to pass. For when Jehu entered the city Jezreel, the queen, having “painted her face and tired her head, looked out at a window.” But the infamous woman did not succeed this time with her meretricious arts; the heart of the rude captain remained unmoved and impenetrable as a rock. He lifted up his eyes and called to the chamberlains who stood near, to throw her down; and they threw her down, so that the wall and the horses were besprinkled with her blood, and she was trodden under foot, like the mire in the street. And it was not till after Jehu bad gone into the city, and had eaten and drunk, that he said, “Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king’s daughter. And they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.”

And they that were sent returned to Jehu and told him; then said he, “This is the word of the Lord which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the suburbs of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the carcass of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the suburbs of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel!”

Behold, my brethren, how the Lord fulfills his word! How ought this thought to strike all impenitent sinners with horror; for he who denounces against them everlasting punishment, the same God whose name is FAITHFUL AND TRUE; and it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, then for one tittle of his word to fail.

II. The thunder of Elijah’s denunciation produced on this occasion some effect

Ahab knew whom he had before him, and that it was not this man’s custom to beat the air, and to utter vain words. The idolatrous monarch is astonished and deeply affected. He feels the load of guilt which lies upon him. His conscience is alarmed, and his past iniquities rise up in terrific array before him.

Doubtless it must have seemed to him as if he saw the spirit of the murdered Naboth standing before him; as if he heard from the graves of the massacred saints a thousand-fold cry ascending to heaven for vengeance against him; as if the lightnings of God’s fiery jealousy already flashed upon his guilty head; and as if he heard behind him the howling of the dogs of Jezreel panting for his blood.

The feeling which overpowered him at the fiery sign on Carmel revives in all its liveliness with a thousand horrors. He is now but too assuredly convinced that the Lord is God, and that Elijah is his messenger. The poor powerless wretch feels as if he were already at the judgment-seat of the Almighty; as if the thunder of the divine rebuke was rolling over his head; as if the angels of justice were about to drag him to the place of torment.

He forgets his crown and his purple, conscious that he is an enormous sinner, and is not ashamed to express this consciousness before God and man. He descends into the dust, rends his clothes in token of the distress and wretchedness of his soul, puts on sackcloth, and falls down before the God of Elijah; appoints a fast, unconcerned whether it may please his heathen consort or not;

even during the nights, his penitential exercises are continued; he goes softly and sorrowfully for a time, like a real subject of penitential grief. Joy is mute in the place which was ordinarily so full of merriment; the pipe and the viol no longer resound through the glittering saloons; the royal residence is like a house of mourning and death; and the gloom of the king seems to have spread itself like a black cloud over all his attendants.

This mourning of the king of Samaria was real as far as it went. The wretched outward dress in which he appeared was a true expression of his inward temper and state of mind. Still, much was wanting in his repentance to render it a repentance unto life and salvation. It was not a mourning like that of the woman that was a sinner, at the feet of Jesus, like that of the thief on the cross, or that of the poor publican. Ahab's repentance was utterly destitute of LOVE; and it is love which hallows all our acts and deeds, and gives them a real value.

Let us take occasion, from this conduct Ahab, to learn what is a real gracious repentance. Paul describes the latter, when, in Galatians 2:19, he says, "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." By the law to which he is dead, is to be understood here, the sum of the divine demands on man, together with the threatenings and curses attached to it.

Now, the apostle here tells us not that he has escaped like a truant from his schoolmaster, or deserted the law like others; but that he is dead to it, lawfully delivered from it, even as a woman is no longer bound to her husband, but may contract a new marriage when her first marriage is terminated by the death of her husband.

Every man, whether he knows it or not, is thus, by nature, bound to the covenant of the law. That is to say, if he obey the law perfectly, the law will reward him; if he disobey it, which he always does, he becomes liable to the penalty of its curse.

As soon then as the law vindicates its injured majesty in the conscience of anyone, the bondage of that curse is felt. Consequently the terrified individual generally undertakes to satisfy the law in the way of obedience, by his own good works; and he thinks he has ability sufficient for the purpose. But here he sets his feet upon a path, from which no one ever brought anything back but broken bones, a wounded heart, and a troubled conscience.

Alas, what does he now experience! Instead of coming forth from the mire of sin, he daily sinks deeper into it; and instead of proceeding forwards, he hourly retrogrades. His best resolutions are rendered fruitless by his failure to fulfill them; and the mournful consciousness that he is a thousand times more corrupt than he had ever supposed, and, and the vexation, anger, trouble, and chagrin, which, as the Scripture says, the law is wont to cause in every one who ventures to cope with it in his own strength -these are the only and the bitter fruit which he derives from his labor. What then is to be done?

Perfect obedience can be thought of no more; he gives up the idea of it, and seeks to come to an agreement with the law in another manner. But how? He tries to flee from the law-he turns deserter. "Why," thinks he, "should I torment myself any longer upon a path where my sincerest endeavors are perpetually defeated!" And with this desponding thought he returns to his former vain conversation, gives the reins to his flesh, and indulges freely the desires of his heart.

But though he forsakes the law, the law does not forsake him. It pursues him, disturbs him, and surprises him, from time to time, with its awful denunciations; for these are within him, and he cannot flee from them. What is he now to do?

One way still stands open to him. He endeavors to capitulate with the law, and to come off with it on amicable terms. He resolves to keep it as well as he is able, and seeks to live according to its requirements, as far as it lies in his power; and thus he hopes it will cease to curse him so dreadfully, and allow him to comfort himself with the mercy of God as to all wherein he may still be deficient. But, however reasonable such a proposal may seem, it proves unsuccessful.

The law will not be satisfied with any partial fulfillment. It demands a perfect obedience; and however much the sinner may do, as he thinks, to the utmost of his ability, the law does not at all lower its tone of malediction, but still disquiets the conscience, Hence the poor helpless man finds no resource left, but to plead guilty at once before the tribunal of leaven, confessing that the law is just in its demands and threatenings; declaring his own moral bankruptcy, and crying with the apostle, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Nature, indeed, strives mightily against this condemnation, recoils from pronouncing sentence against herself, and trembles at the death she has deserved. But the light shines victoriously into her darkness, The convinced soul sinks, as a man slain in battle before the foot of the throne of grace, and; with dread, distress, and amazement, exclaims, “Woe is me, for I am undone!”

Now, when a sinner has thus, with heartfelt seriousness, pronounced sentence against himself before the throne of God, he has begun to die to the law. For here is an end of his supposed righteousness, and of his own supposed ability to rescue himself. But that true repentance, which the Scripture calls a godly sorrow, and a repentance which needeth not to be repented of, does not therefore as yet necessarily exist. This is but, it were, dying before the divine holiness; as we see was the case of Paul, in Romans 7:1-25, “When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.”

Now thus dying under the law, and by the law, does not amount to dying to the law. The sinner, thus alarmed and humbled, is dead to the supposition of his moral excellences; but the marriage between him and law is not yet dissolved. On the contrary, this hard and severe husband and schoolmaster still rebukes and chastens him; for the sinner has yet an enmity against the law, as well as against Him who gave it. His whole nature murmurs at it; he is vexed and irritated that the law exists; he does not love it, he would rather see it destroyed, because it robs him of his peace, and puts a restraint upon his sinful flesh. Hence, his repentance is not of the right kind; he is not renewed in the spirit of his mind; and that DYING to the law, of which the apostle speaks, is still to come.

Now, this glorious and happy death comes by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). And this law is no other than the Gospel; whereby alone it is that true, divine, and saving repentance is called forth.

Let us, then, consider once more the case of the awakened and alarmed sinner, trembling almost on the verge of despair. His natural disposition is still opposed to the law, and the distress of his conscience forbids him to lift up his eyes to the Lord. But lo! The light of the New Testament begins to irradiate the darkness of his mind; the cross appears amidst the clouds of his distresses;

the glad tidings of the Gospel sound in his ears, and reach his understanding and his heart.

And now observe what a wonderful change immediately takes place in his whole being. He hears that there is help and redemption for him; hears that the Father, in order to save him, has sent his only begotten Son into the world; hears that this Holy One has taken our sins upon himself; hears that he has paid the debt, suffered the deserved punishment, endured the wrath of God, in the sinner's stead, and has thereby obtained eternal redemption for him.

The sinner hears it, is amazed, astonished, scarcely believes for joy, looks at his Surety, beholds his sufferings, his head crowned with thorns, his countenance beaming , with infinite love, and his heart, once pierced for sinners, full of compassion and mercy on their behalf. What feelings of gratitude spring up within him under such manifestations of the kindness and love of God his Saviour! He bows himself under the sceptre of his divine Deliverer!

Filial reverence and godly sorrow take the place of servile fear, and peaceful adoring humility supersedes the terrors of the broken law. His enmity against the law is departed. His hatred to it is changed into love; for it is the expression of the divine will of that same gracious God, to whose mercy he owes all his salvation.

Hence, he now delights in the law, and flees from sin as from a serpent. He flees from it; not because of terror and outward constraint; not from fear of punishment; but from love to the Saviour, whom he would now gladly obey in every respect, and to whose glory he heartily desires to dedicate his whole life. This, therefore, is true and divine repentance unto life; a repentance springing from faith and love.

A wonderful death has now taken place. The marriage between the law and the sinner is dissolved, and that lawfully. The law now leaves him in peace; for the believer in Christ is made "the rightness of God in him;" and what the law commands is now the very fruit which the good tree produces of itself, from the new principle of faith in the Son of God.

But the repentance of Ahab was not of this kind. His enmity against the law was not abolished and slain by faith and love. It was the punishment, and not the sinfulness of sin, that made him tremble. Had no curse followed, his transgressions would have pained him but little. Nay, because this punishment was delayed, he turned back into the path of destruction, and by so doing, furnished the clearest evidence that his sorrow proceeded only from selfishness, and that the dominion and love of sin still prevailed within him.

III. But though Ahab's repentance was far from genuine, it was

nevertheless regarded by the Almighty with some favor

He therefore sent his word to Elijah the Tishbite, and said to him, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

Here was then a delay of execution; but no revocation of the sentence. The curse still rested upon Ahab and his house. Yet even this respect shown to a repentance which had so little intrinsic worth, this exemption of Ahab from personally experiencing those storms which impended over his house, was an instance of great condescension and favor.

But why, it may be asked, if Ahab's humiliation was so little worth, was any divine regard shown towards it? This, we answer, was to show by a living example, that self-condemnation and abasement before God is the way to escape his anger, and obtain his favor. Just as a novice in any art or trade may he cheered by words of encouragement at the first favorable attempt which he makes, however far it may be from perfection; so the exemption which the Lord made in Ahab's favor on his thus repenting was calculated, to encourage him to aim at something better. Self-condemnation, self-abasement, and giving God the glory are the first steps from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We are not, therefore, to regard it as any decisive mark of our state of grace, that we at any time experience the forbearance of God upon humbling ourselves before him; or that he at any time vouchsafes a signal answer to our cry of distress, and disperses some of the heavy clouds which impend over us. For, all this may be only as an encouragement to true and sincere repentance; it by no means proves that our praying and humbling ourselves contain anything spiritual, or that we are really restored to true friendship with God.

All history shows, that whenever any prince or people have given glory to God and his word, though only by an outward confession, it has been attended with signal blessings of Providence" But to infer from this, that, nations and princes were in special favor with God would be found unsupported by Scripture proof.

We often see persons, whom we dare not regard as truly converted to God, who nevertheless agree to all the statements and confessions of Scripture truth; they are evidently controlled by a certain dread of God's displeasure; but they do not live in obedience to the commandments of Christ: contrary, they love the world, and the things that are in the world; and yet God temporally blesses them and their household, and they enjoy the respect and regard of persons far more piously disposed than themselves; but these external blessings must never be accounted an argument of their own state of grace; for, if they be so regarded, men may find themselves one day miserably undeceived.

God often gives many temporal blessings to such persons, that his goodness may lead to true repentance. But these temporal favors are no seals of Divine adoption. Let no one, therefore, deceive himself; for, "except ye be born again, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." The best that can be said of multitudes, is what was here said of Ahab: "Seest thou how they humble themselves before me? because they humble themselves before me, I will not bring evil upon them in their lifetime; but at length that day shall come upon them as a thief, and they shall hear it said unto them, I know you not; depart from me!"

Many, it is to be feared, are still in a situation similar to that of Ahab in the field of Naboth. Dreadful curses are pronounced upon them; awful judgments hang over their guilty heads; snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest; all which will one day discharge themselves upon such unhappy people. Only one outlet stands open to them; and this consists in true self-condemnation and self-abasement. Not that these things have any merit belonging to them; but they imply a hunger and a thirst after righteousness, and that righteousness is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. The moment we stretch out the hand of faith to lay hold on this righteousness, the curse is removed, and we are made accepted in the Beloved.

Let Ahab’s example ever be a warning to ourselves, lest, notwithstanding the most remarkable visitations of the Almighty, the strongest allurements, the most lively emotions-yea, notwithstanding much penitential conflict, and many answers received to our prayers-still we should fall short at last.

Take heed that your repentance exceed the repentance of Ahab, lest it should have to be repented of when it is too late. When you come to your deathbed, and with an awakened mind tremblingly behold the gates of eternity open before you, you may indeed perform a repentance which may not be unto life, except you repent now.

At such an hour there may be no word of comfort for you that will reach your heart, or heal your wounded spirit. For the repentance of a deathbed is a very ambiguous matter; it may contain no true repentance towards God, nor any true faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And this may even be made evident by the defects which it manifests.

For how often do we see such a repentance, unaccompanied by any heartfelt lamentation over the man’s spiritual corruption, by any hungering or thirsting after righteousness, by any longing after fellowship with God, or by any desire of love to God!

It is nothing more than the mere shudder of nature; it is only that awful dread of the Most High which the evil spirits felt, when they besought Jesus not to command them away into the deep!

But, may God be gracious to us, and fill now us with that “godly sorrow, which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of!” Let our repentance be that of affectionate children, who can have no rest till the kind but justly offended parent again looks kindly upon them; let faith and love be the life and soul of our repentance; let it prove its genuineness by an unfeigned surrender of ourselves into the Lord’s hands. Then shall there be joy in heaven over us among the angels of God; then shall we have an indubitable pledge and seal of our adoption into the family of God; and hereafter all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

02.19. The Journey to Ekron

The Journey to Ekron CHAPTER NINETEEN

“But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel” (Isaiah 43:22.

I scarcely know a more heart-affecting expression than this. It is the mournful language of a neglected and disregarded friend. And who is this friend? It is he, who is Love itself; it is the Father of mercies; it is the Saviour of sinners. Alas! Who has more cause for such complaint than himself! If anyone is forgotten, neglected, and mistaken on earth, it is the compassionate Friend of penitent sinners!

Do not men seem to have conspired to blot out the remembrance of him? Thousands, who are called by his name, reject him. Those who are set as pastors of his flock will not hear his voice. To be followers of the Lamb, in the present day, is too much everywhere a reproach.

- Decorum forbids even his name to be mentioned;

- Social life has cast out the Lord of glory as a disturber of its peace;

- Science increasingly disregards him in places very many;

- Art dedicates its colors and its melody to ether gods;

- Most of the writings and books which are circulated through the world, boldly disclaim any connection or friendship with him.

There is therefore sufficient reason for the mournful complaint of the Holy One of Israel: “Thou hast not called upon me: thou hast been weary of me!” and who can doubt that he has a right to make this complaint, or that he has the very best claim upon our affectionate remembrance?

Behold, he took our nature upon him; he became a man of unparalleled sorrows; his head was crowned with thorns; he was crucified for us!

Yes, out of free love to sinners, he yielded up himself, that he might be our Surety and Representative, standing in our place, and bearing our punishment: and, be astonished, O ye heavens, regarding as parts of his own mystical body every individual whom he has redeemed.

- He associated himself with us in his death, that he might associate us with himself in his glory

- He caused our sins to be placed to his account, that he might clothe us with his virtues;

- He suffered himself to be crushed beneath our curse, that he might raise us to his own glory.

Behold, this has he done for us! What think you then? Does he require too much of us in requiring us to remember him, to call upon him, and not to be weary of him? This requirement he makes of everyone amongst us. May the heart of everyone be open to receive it, and to comply with it! For,

are there none among us to whom it may be said, You no longer wish to remember him and to be in communion with him, as you once did? You have forgotten your first love.

Once you seemed to wait upon him, but now you love the world and the things that are in the world; preferring its husks before the bread of eternal life. Is it not so?

“Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord.”

O think upon what he has done for you; how he has preserved you; how he has delivered you. There was a time when you believed that the Lord had done it! But now you have forgotten this! And forgotten even the Lord himself. But his memory is not like yours. Lo, he stands before you, and complains that you have not called upon him, but have been weary of him.

O smite upon your breast, and say, “God be merciful unto me a sinner.” May our meditations on the subject now to be considered serve to impress these thoughts more indelibly upon our hearts!

“And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease. But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed” (2 Kings 1:2-4). This narrative may serve for a variety of serious reflections. We divide our meditation into three Parts, showing, I. The application to Ekron;

II. His Divine jealousy;

III. The paramount claims of Jesus Christ.

I. Israel had now changed its ruler

Ahab had fallen under the hand of the Lord, and the throne was filled by his son Ahaziah, a worthless character, who did only evil in the sight of the Lord, walking the ways of his father and mother, and causing Israel to sin. He served Baal and worshiped him, and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger, as his father Ahab had done. The Almighty therefore saw it not good to sheath the sword of vengeance.

The first painful stroke upon Ahaziah was the revolt of the Moabites.

This people had for many years been tributary to the kings of Israel; but under Ahaziah they rebelled, and conquered. We have now before us another visitation which Ahaziah experienced. Standing one day on a balcony of his palace, the balustrade on which he leaned suddenly gave way. The king was precipitated to the ground, was seriously injured, and “was sick.”

The Lord not infrequently so arranges it, that his judgments lay hold of the ungodly and profane at the very time when they are most at their ease and security. How often have we heard of men, who, with the cup of festivity in their hands, and the sound of the harp and the viol in their ears, have been suddenly struck dead by the divine hand, have fallen paralyzed to the ground, or been seized by some other catastrophe! The severity of God is then rendered the more apparent by the contrast between their revelry and the divine visitation; and the cry against the vanity of the world,

uttered by such judgments, is the more loudly and alarmingly heard, by reason of the sudden reverse.

Ahaziah lies sick; but, alas, we behold in him the same state of mind on his sick bed as we perceive in many others who come within our own observation. Here is only another proof of the melancholy truth, that the severest afflictions are ineffectual in themselves to soften the sinner's heart; and thus we see that the power which converts the soul does not consist in misfortunes and outward events, but solely in the mercy and grace of God.

How much had Ahaziah heard and seen in his father's time, which, humanly speaking, might have led him to repentance! How remarkably had the Almighty revealed himself again in Israel, and what terrific proofs had he given of his severity and jealousy!

Though all this must have been fresh in Ahaziah's memory, yet he acts as if such awful realities, with his own father's fearful lend, had been only an idle tale: instead of humbling himself before the living God, his heart still cleaves to idolatry; and he sends to the Philistine oracle at Ekron, where men worshiped an idol named Baalzebub; that is, the lord of flies: probably so named because the plague of flies, which was common in that region, was attributed to his displeasure; or else, because he was honored as a protector from that plague.

The idol of Ekron was supposed to give oracular answers, through the medium of its priests, respecting future events; and it had obtained such general credence, that it was resorted to from a considerable distance. That the predictions there uttered, and the prodigies there exhibited, were connected with infernal influence, can hardly be doubted.

Pagan idolatry in general seems to have been supported and maintained by infernal magic. When, in the divine Judgments upon Antichrist and his kingdom, Satan shall suffer that signal defeat which is denounced against him in the Word of God, it will be found that it was he who created and maintained the worship of idols, and that it was from his agency that he kingdom of darkness and falsehood received its Principal support.

And when heathenism shall become bereaved of this satanical support, then will the eyes of the blind world be opened, and men will be astonished how they could have adhered for thousands of years to a mere nonentity, and will come from the east and the west the Lord in Zion.

The idol at Ekron and his oracle was the first remedy that the sick king at Samaria could think of. He assembled his servants about him, and proceeded by their means to an act of impiety as great as could well be committed in Israel.

"Go," said he, openly and shamelessly, "inquire Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease."

Conduct such as this of cannot outwardly be imitated by ourselves, because gross idolatry exists no longer among us, and the polite world is too enlightened to consult the devil in person, having long held Satan and hell to be merely the puerile notions of antiquity. Yet after all, we find upon closer inspection, our own philosophic age is full of that heathen leaven, though it is now molded into a more refined form; and experience shows that disbelief of the more "sure word of prophecy" only leads into new superstition.

It is true, the presentiment of an invisible world, and the necessity of entering it, it is indelibly impressed upon the human mind. But those who scorn to submit this feeling to the rule of Scripture, and to seek satisfaction in the divinely revealed record, are sure to sink under dominion of darkness and imposture. As a counterpart to the oracle at Ekron and Endor, we have, present day visionaries and somnambulists; instead of the Delphic tripod and the Dodonian oak, we have pretended prophets and fortune tellers, whose numbers are greater amongst the people than is generally supposed; and if we above believing these, still we have our forebodings, our presentiments, and our dreams, of which many are apt to make as much as of the divine oracles.

The place of the ancient heathen mysteries is occupied by a multitude of covert associations, in whose mystic obscurities thousands seek those disclosures which they refuse to accept from the hand of the living God; and though they can smile with scorn at the magicians of antiquity, they do not think it beneath them to have recourse to amulets and charms, to which popular belief ascribes mysterious powers; or they endeavor to cure diseases by what are called sympathetic remedies.

But suppose we are free from such superstitions, still, when we hear a mother entreating the physician to save her child, and when, upon any one referring to the blessing of God for success, offence is taken at this reference, is not here the same spirit as we see in Ahaziah? Is not here a running after idols, an Idolatry of means? Yet how common is this among us. How many are there who have never seriously thought of applying to the God of Israel, and who seem to know of no other God in their necessities and embarrassments, except the creature-dust and ashes!

But woe unto those who give to idols the glory which belongs to God alone! That the Lord does not regard such conduct with indifference, the sequel of this narrative will teach us.

II. What then became of Ahaziah?

He sent to Ekron, to inquire of Baalzebub; but instead of the lying voice of the idol, he hears the awful words of the living God.

The angel of the Lord directs Elijah the Tishbite to “go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and to say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.”

It is Christ, the Angel of the Lord, who spoke thus to Elijah. Why it was he, is not difficult to understand. The Lord God Immanuel had the greatest cause for being displeased at Ahaziah’s impiety! He had done everything to gain the hearts of sinners, and to lead them to the most entire confidence in himself. During a series of ages he had visited his people Israel with manifestations of the most condescending kindness and love.

Even in the times of the patriarchs, he had shown how his “delights were with the sons of men,” and how ready he was to assist them with his counsel in all their affairs; not only with means ordained by himself, but even without means upon many and various occasions. He had revealed himself as “a very present help” to those who sincerely sought him; and had shown his lovingkindness in such a manner, that it seemed as if he lived for their sakes. Yet Israel revolted from Him, and resorted to idols. This was a heinous offence, and justly provoked his displeasure. Such was the case in the present instance. He therefore appeared himself, to complain of the

ingratitude, and with how much reason does he send word to the messengers, saying, “Is it because there is no God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?”

We can imagine with what difficulty some will be persuaded that it was the eternal God who here appeared to Elijah, and spoke to him as the children of men are wont to speak. But we must learn to know him in his deepest humiliation, in the manger and on the cross, and become acquainted with him in that love in which he was willing to become despised and rejected in the eyes of men, in order to bring us to glory; and in which he devoted himself to death as the Lamb of God, that he might obtain for us eternal redemption by his blood.

When we have once become acquainted with him in these profound humiliations, his other condescensions will no longer astonish us. He who has seen that which is greater, ceases to be perplexed at that which is less.

Nor let anyone be offended because the mighty God appears in this history as provoked at inquiry being made at Ekron, instead of being addressed to himself. Blessed be his grace! It is because of the greatness of his love that he is not indifferent how we are affected towards him. He wishes to be loved by his people; and not this only, but with wonderful and most condescending kindness, and with a holy jealousy he watches over our love to him, and desires to possess it entirely.

Yes, his children may well be on their guard against dividing their hearts between God and mammon. He will not suffer it, but will rather use severity even towards those who are as the apple of his eye. He will come with the rod and chastise them; or he will tear from their arms the objects which rob him of his place in their hearts. For he seeks to possess their whole hearts; and how blessed are we, when He who alone is worthy of our supreme love, has obtained it.

III. And as he desires our love entire and undivided, so it is

his will that our confidence for peace and strength

should be reposed in alone

Immanuel must be all in all to us.

Moses said, in the spirit of prophecy, Deuteronomy 33:8, “Let thy Thummim and thy Urim, O Levi, (let thy light and thy righteousness) be with thy Holy One whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah, “doubtless he refers to Christ. It is as much as to say, “O Levi, do not seek thy light, and thy perfections, or thy righteousness elsewhere; do not sever thy high priesthood from Messiah; do not go to any other for thine oracles.”

But how does this apply to us? I answer, Surely a separation of the Urim and Thummim from the Holy One is effected when we are no longer satisfied with him alone. When we consult human inventions for our help and comfort instead of walking in the simplicity of honoring the Lord Christ; when we seek to be our own priests and to atone for ourselves, instead of letting all our light, and righteousness, and perfection rest with our Holy One.

There are no complaints more commonly heard among believers, than of the poor work the they make of praying, praising and thanksgiving. Hence they become painfully afraid lest their poor utterances should never obtain a hearing. But remember the great Intercessor, who stands day

and night before God to receive such poor petitions of his people and to present them before the throne. Remember also that the sufferings and death of Christ, his obedience and righteousness-even the whole sum of his infinite and precious merits-make intercession for you, and, as it were, pray with you.

Wherefore, believer, if you can only utter three words before God, yea, if your very voice seem stifled at the foot of his throne, yet remember that he loves you with the same love with which he hath loved his Son; and, as often as you pray, hold fast this confidence. Remember that your great Intercessor prays with you and for you, and that your prayers ascend through his righteousness. This will give unction to your petitions, and whatsoever you ask you will receive of him.

In the breastplate of the high priest were set twelve of the most precious stones, engraven with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus these names were surrounded with glory and beauty; and as they served to typify the spiritual glory and beauty which all the Israel of God possess in their true High Priest, Christ Jesus, so they may serve to remind us not to separate our sanctification from Christ, but to let it rest entirely with him. Thus let thy Urim and thy Thummim be with thy Holy One.

But, alas! In how many different ways is this precept forgotten by professed Christians, and how many systems and methods are here which disagree with it.

Proud self-sufficient man, in his hereditary depravity, would live without dependence upon Him who is made unto us of God not only wisdom and righteousness, but sanctification also. 1 Corinthians 1:30. For how many who call themselves Christians, are righteous in their own eyes, and pure in their own sight! And what system of iniquity has been built up for ages in support of this delusion!

Devotees to this system think, by the accomplishment of a certain daily of religious exercises, to make themselves perfect in the sight of God. Such is the system of POPERY. There are many who seek their excellence in a variety of outward observances, and would gladly persuade themselves and others that they are purified from every spot of sin. But how little do they know the depth of their own corruption, or the unspeakable holiness of God!

Whereas the foundation of all our hope and confidence ought to be only the perfection of our surety, Christ Jesus. The faith of the heart in his imputed righteousness is the only true spring and principle of all Christian virtue. Its clothing is humility, its fruit is love, its aim is the glory of God.

When counsel was asked of God in Israel, application was made to the high priest, who, by the Urim and Thummim, obtained a Divine answer. In like manner let us act, and not make ourselves our own counselors. Ye who are anxious as to what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed, what are you doing? Is your High Priest dead, and are you constrained to bear the official breastplate yourselves? Cast your cares upon him, and He will be your Counselor. Suffer not this or that particular event to confuse or startle you; all will come to pass as the great Prophet of the church has predicted.

Look around you in this present world from the vantage ground of His word, and you will find firm footing amidst the whirl of daily occurrences: you will understand, in some salutary measure, the book of providence, and will look forward with joy to the finishing of the mystery of God. The eye of

the Christian looks over the gloomy foreground into the golden distances which are behind, and sees the dawn of jubilee fringing with rosy edges the clouds of the present scene of things.

Let our whole wisdom be with Christ. Let us cleave to the sure word of prophecy, so much the more courageously and faithfully, as the father of lies shall make greater efforts to seduce us from the only citadel wherein we are secure, and to strip us of our Divine armor. Away with that philosophy and science which are falsely so-called; away with the dreams of modern illuminati; away with all vain pretensions to spiritual gifts, and abide in that which ye have heard from the beginning. “Keep that which is committed unto you; but shun profane and vain babblings!” Let your light and your righteousness, your knowledge and your wisdom, rest with your Holy One, even Christ.

Remember, that as the names of the children of Israel were inscribed on the precious stones of the high priest’s breastplate, so our Saviour bears the names of all his children upon his heart; and that as their names are laid upon him by the Father, so Christ’s name is laid upon them. As he is, so are we in this world. In Him therefore who died for us we can triumph, and say,

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.” In him who is risen again, “who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,” we can triumph and say, “O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?”

Let not unbelief, therefore, let not spiritual bareness, let not cold-hearted prayers, or any adverse occurrence, deprive us of the enjoyment of him, so as to make us doubt of his love, and utter the unbelieving complaint, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.”

Let us assuredly believe in the unchangeable of his love, and thus be preserved in cheerful obedience and resignation.

Let us become accustomed to regard ourselves as bound to the heart of our great Mediator; and commit to this Bearer of our names before God the whole care of our safety and happiness. Of all that the Father hath given him will he lose nothing.

Let us not, then, burden ourselves with matters which God hath as little imposed upon us as we are fitted for them. Let us commit all our affairs to our great Shepherd, Mediator, and Intercessor, and, leaning on his almighty arm, go on our way rejoicing. It is thus he would have us act, and thus he fulfills in us the blessing of the prophet.

“Let thy Urim and thy Thummim be with thy Holy One!” Remember, my brethren, that he is, and ever shall be, “all and in all.” As he is “made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption;” to look after any other aid than that which is prepared for us in him is vile ingratitude, an insult offered him, a crime against his majesty.

Cursed, therefore, be the paths that lead to Endor and to Ekron! The feet must fail and be maimed that are found on these roads! There is a God in Israel! who-be astonished, O heavens-full of salvation, righteousness, and aid, will supply all our need! To whom do we owe all our confidence but to him? O let us but be dissolved in tears of joy before our King; and “let thy Urim and thy Thummim ever be with thy Holy One!” Amen.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

02.20. The Preaching By Fire

The Preaching By Fire

CHAPTER TWENTY The vital energy of the church of God upon earth manifests itself in a threefold activity, directed to the three great objects of self-renovation, union, and missions. Of this threefold operation of the true church Paul speaks, in Ephesians 2:20-22.

By self-renovation, we understand the effort of the church to expel from within her every foreign, unscriptural element that may have crept in; to remove errors from her midst; and to build herself up on the true foundation of the prophets' and apostles' doctrine, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

By her endeavors after union, we understand that activity of the true church by which she seeks to combine believers more closely together, and to promote more and more their growing up into him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; as the apostle says, "In whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

By missionary activity, the church endeavors to enlarge her boundaries, to recover new provinces from the prince of darkness, to increase the number of her children, whether from the heathen or the nominally Christian world, and to build them together on the same foundation, "for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Now wherever the true church exists she invariably manifests this threefold vital activity; but sometimes one indication of it predominates over the rest.

In some places, for instance, the doctrines of the majority are correct and scriptural, and she has rather to devote her powers to the growth and union of her children. But, in general, her self-renovating activity is what is most required, and her work is to lay afresh those foundations which the father of lies has subverted.

The prophet Elijah was an eminent reformer under the Old Testament. The restoration of idolatrous Israel to the faith of their forefathers, was the commission entrusted to him.

We should keep this in view as we meditate upon the events of his life, and thus we shall better understand the peculiar character of some of those events. That part of his history in particular which is now before us, will hereby become divested of the strangeness of its first appearance.

"And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back? And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.

"And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?

“And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.

“And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite. Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

“Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

“And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.

“And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him.

“And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.

“So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son” (2 Kings 1:5-17).

Thus ends the narrative which commenced with the mission to Ekron.

- “Our God is a consuming fire!”

- “God is not mocked!”

- “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”

Let us pause, and consider the marvelous contest here related. Here is, I. Ahaziah’s attempt against Elijah;

II. The prophet’s victory;

III. Ahaziah’s awful overthrow.

I. The messengers of the king are already on their way to Ekron

Leaving the guilt mission with their master’s conscience, they proceed with alacrity on their journey, and they have already settled in their own minds the time when they shall arrive at Ekron.

But the Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vain. Another oracle comes forth to meet them, from a quarter quite unlooked for. All at once a living barrier stands in their way. A man

suddenly appears before them of a majestic figure, clothed in a hairy mantle. Here is no troop of angels, no any mailed band of men; nothing but an individual fellowman without armor or weapons. Yet astonishment seizes the courtly messengers at the sight of him, and their train and equipage are obliged to halt.

“The Tishbite!” is the word of alarm from one to the other; and before they have time to inquire and advise together, the venerable stranger confronts them and discharges his divine commission:

“Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die?”

The stranger having spoken these words, turned about and went his way. We may well imagine the consternation occasioned by this unexpected encounter; how the men looked fully at each other and knew not what to say. Little had they dreamed of carrying back to their prince such a speedy answer to his inquiry, and this too without money and without price. But from whom does it come? O they are conscious that it comes from an oracle that cannot lie.

They have no heart to proceed on their journey to Ekron; they dare not do it. They know too well this terrible man, the fire-tested messenger of the Lord’s displeasure. They turn about in haste, as if the least delay were dangerous, and return with awful apprehensions to Samaria. Verily it cannot always he foreseen what may happen on such journeys as those to Ekron or to Endor. It is a fearful thing to pass by God and his word, and to turn aside to lying vanities. In courses like these, how many have met with such disclosures as might well both make their ears tingle and their hearts quake.

Many a one, by having recourse to refuges of lies, has forever lost sight of the light of truth, and lived and died under strong delusions. Let us, therefore, never forget the exhortation of the apostle: “Little children, abide in Him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

II. King Ahaziah lying upon his couch, supposes his

messengers to be on the road to Ekron But lo! Unexpectedly the door of his apartment opens, and the messengers stand before his bed. Almost before he has time to wonder what this can mean, they begin to relate to him what has happened to them on the way.

“There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.”

Terrific as was this message, the king collects himself sufficiently to inquire, “What manner of man was he which came up to meet you and told you these words?”

“He was a hairy man,” answered they, “and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.”

This portrait was well known to the king. “Yes,” says he, with as much composure as he could assume, “I thought so; it is Elijah the Tishbite!”

The king dismisses his messengers. “Send me hither one of my captains,’ cries he with stifled fury and resentment. The captain appears in the sick man’s chamber, and reads in the features of his lord the nature of his commission.

“Go with your troop,” says Ahaziah, “seize Elijah the, Tishbite and bring him to me!” The captain bows obediently and hastens to fulfill the king’s orders.

Let us reflect a moment on the monstrous presumption which the sick monarch here exhibits! He knows who the man is whom he is about to attack. He has seen the mighty acts with which the Lord had borne testimony to this his own messenger. He knows that God had a second time, in Elijah’s case, “hearkened to the voice of a man,” and that this redoubted champion of truth has the Almighty Himself for his shield; yea, that the thunder and fiery flame of heaven has been at his command.

Yet all this prevents him not from taking the field against the prophet, and thus virtually declaring war against the King of kings. Impiety renders him frantic, and his feverish fury robs him of his understanding. A handful of chaff would now contend with the fire, and a fleeting vapor would combat with the storm! Surely all this is no longer merely natural. Strong satanical delusion has taken possession of this senseless transgressor, and it is evident that he is become judicially blind.

The captain with his fifty departs upon his commission, and it is not long before he meets the enemy. On the summit of a mountain-probably on Carmel-they come in sight of the prophet. There he sits solitary and silent, immersed in sacred meditations. But he sits there like a king upon his throne, secure in his God and surrounded by an invisible guard. He beholds the host approaching him with glittering weapons, and easily imagines who has sent them, and what is their errand. But he is not afraid in his invisible but impregnable fortress.

He is well able to confront them under the banner of his God, and quietly suffers them to come against him. They approach nearer and nearer to surround him as their prisoner; but something in his appearance, or in their thoughts of him, keeps them still at a respectful distance. It seems as if they had a presentiment of peril should they venture to seize him.

The captain, therefore, contents himself with imperatively declaring his master’s order. “Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.”

The Prophet feels a holy indignation for the honor of his God. He opens his mouth with a faith which would have removed mount Carmel into the midst of the sea had it been necessary, and exclaims, “If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty!”

No sooner had he uttered the words, then the Lord heard them; for to prayers which seek only his honor and glory he refuses not his Yea and Amen! The fire descends from heaven, and the captain with his fifty lie dead below the prophet’s feet. When this terrible event is notified to the king of Israel, he becomes so infatuated with rage, that instead of perceiving what power he was up against, he sends forth a second captain with his fifty, seemingly more daring than the first; who finds Elijah still in the same place. He draws near, at the head of his fifty, to the servant of the Lord and with astonishing presumption addresses him in sight of the slain around him, “O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.” “If I be a man of God,” answers Elijah the second

time, “let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty!” And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

One would suppose that the intelligence of this second defeat would have caused a change in Ahaziah’s mind, and have induced him to conclude a truce in this impious war; but no! He is resolved to hold it out to the last. He sends out a third captain with his fifty, for the purpose of bringing the prophet to him as his prisoner. The captain departs with his company of soldiers, and there is a fearful prospect of the wrathful judgment being repeated a third time.

Elijah still sits in the same place upon his eminence. He is not afraid of many thousands; for he knows that he has sufficient strength in his God to lay any army in the dust that might come against him. But when the third captain at the head of his company arrives at the mount, and beholds the man of God, and the dead bodies of the slain lying below, he is seized with a feeling of reverential dread, which he in vain labors to overcome.

He feels that it is bearing arms against the Almighty himself to bear them against his ambassador; and, overpowered by the awe with which the presence of the holy man inspired him, and by the conviction that Elijah’s God is the true God, he puts up his sword into the scabbard, approaches the prophet with reverence, falls on his knee before him, and exclaims, “O man of God, pray thee let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties; therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight!”

O how must Elijah have rejoiced at this submission to the living God, which saved him from the mournful necessity of vindicating the honor of the Lord a third time with consuming flames of fire! For he had no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but it was his delight, even as it is the delight of his Lord, that the sinner should turn from his ways and live. Doubtless it caused him no little pain, when he was compelled to call for the sword of the Almighty to be unsheathed and his fire from heaven to descend. And when this did take place, it was his divine vocation and the holy object of his mission that required it, for the extirpation of idolatry and the reestablishment of that Divine law which had been trodden under foot, and of that faith of the fathers which had become extinct.

The weapons of Elijah’s warfare were therefore not carnal. They were wielded by that queen of passions-an ardent love to God and his cause-and they were brandished in obedience to a holy zeal for the glory of the Lord’s name. It was because the canker of idolatry had eaten so deeply into the heart of the chosen people, that such severe remedies were required in order that the people might be healed.

In considering such narratives as the present, we should ever remember that the times of Old Testament were very different from those of the Christian dispensation; and that much which it became Elijah to perform would be far from proper for a subject of the New Covenant. Our Saviour in Luke 9:54-56, expresses himself significantly as to the distinction between the old dispensation and the new.

When the disciples, James and John, said to him, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to fall from heaven and consume them even as Elias did?” our Lord replied, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them!”

It seems as if he had intimated that the days of severity were past, and that those of mildness had succeeded them. The discipline of Mount Sinai no longer bears the rule; but patience and love. Elijah was a herald of Divine justice, therefore he necessarily appeared with lightning and thunder on his lips; but ye are messengers of grace, who must gain the hearts of sinners by the Gospel of the tender mercy of God; and thus your feet must be “beautiful upon the mountains” as the patience wherewith the vessels of wrath are endured, has ever since shown that a hand once pierced sways the sceptre of the world’s government, and that a friend of sinners sits on the throne of dominion; so ought the New Testament church to exhibit a faithful likeness of the gentle and patient Lamb of God in whose blood they have made clean, and who, through enduring and suffering, entered into glory.

The lovely image of the compassionate Son of man ought always to be visible in his members. It therefore infinitely more becomes us as followers of the Lamb, to pray for the enemies of his righteous cause, than to desire God’s displeasure upon them. It is unspeakably more befitting us, in patience and meekness to heap coals of fire on the heads of our adversaries, and to overcome them by the power of love; than to call down the wrath of the Almighty upon them.

In short, our whole disposition and conduct ought to evince that we are the disciples of Him who “came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them;” and that, by the cross of Christ, a fountain of love has been disclosed, which has taught us to bear all things, to believe all things, and endure all things; a love which many waters cannot quench.

III. The captain, having besought Elijah that his soul and the souls

of his fifty might be precious in his sight, was spared by means

of this sincere humiliation For God resisteth only the proud and the perverse; but giveth grace to the lowly. The Lord said to Elijah, “Go down with him: be not afraid of him.”

What a command! what a mission! He was now to enter into the very midst of the enemy’s camp, and repeat to the enraged king at Samaria, the judgment of heaven. But the command and implied promise of his God lifts him up, as on eagle’s wings, above every fear. He leaves the lonely hills, and hastens, at the captain’s “side, to the royal city.

Surely as a conqueror enters the gates of some captured fortress, amidst the waving of victorious banners, did Elijah enter the city of Samaria. He knew that in the assembling crowds around him there were few who were not his adversaries; yet he walks through them with a dignity which curls the insolence of the boldest blasphemer. The king, perhaps, is impatiently inquiring whether there be any news of the arrival of his prisoner; when the door of his apartment opens; and who can describe Ahaziah’s amazement at beholding the object of his hatred-the man with the hairy mantel and the leathern girdle, himself approaching his couch.

But he utters no hard word, no triumphant taunt. He knows that in this ungodly man he still beholds his lawful monarch and chief magistrate. Elijah knows that “the powers that be are ordained of God;” and hence, though he is the Lord’s prophet and standing before an apostate and idolatrous king, he in no wise trespasses upon the respect due to royal dignity.

He adheres strictly and literally to the message entrusted to him by the Lord; and, without adding to it or taking from it, he declares, “Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers

to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die!"

Elijah, having thus spoken, departed. But the words he had uttered remained behind. "He died," says the sacred historian "according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken."

The church of God on earth had one destroyer less, and hell one victim more!

"In Judah is God known," sings the Psalmist: "his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah.

"Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep. Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?

"Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still, When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

"Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth" (Psalms 76:2-12).

Hallelujah! To him be the glory and the kingdom for ever and ever! Amen.

~ end of chapter 20 ~

02.21. The Work-Day Evening

The Work-Day Evening CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Sacred history may be regarded as a Divine prediction, which is as yet only in part fulfilled. When we are grieved with the present sad and gloomy state of things, we may well resort to these pleasing oracles, which set forth in type as well as in prophecy the representation of future and better times. For with reference to all that formerly took place of a beautiful or glorious description, in the land where Israel sojourned, it may be said, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). From the history of Eden, down to that of the glorious church of God, every happy event recorded shall ultimately be renewed in a far more glorious manner. May this certainty cheer and animate us as we approach, in the history of Elijah, one of the most glorious events to which divine grace ever gave birth before the Christian era.

“And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel.

“And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

“And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

“And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on” (2 Kings 2:1-6). The prophet has finished his work upon earth and the stormy labors of the day are followed by a beautiful evening, tinged with the golden light of another and a blissful world. He is like the mariner, who, after a long and perilous voyage, is now in sight of the haven of his destination, and joyfully hastens to strike his topmasts and take in his sails.

He walks, for a few days longer, as if already within the hearing of the music of heaven; and can now gratefully recount some of the fruits of his labors, for they begin to manifest themselves more clearly to his view. The events we are now about to consider, will form a pleasing contrast to his past history, and will serve to remind us of that happy period when the enigmas of this life will all be explained in the most satisfactory manner, and its temporary discords resolved into the most exquisite harmony.

Three points in the passage before us are especially worthy our notice:

I. Elijah’s desire for retirement;

II. His visits to the schools of the prophets;

III. The reception he meets with there.

I. Elijah had now withdrawn from more public notice

into the secluded neighborhood of the Jordan

We find him at present in the little town of Gilgal, not far from Jericho, on that memorable spot where Joshua, after the miraculous passage of the river, set up the twelve stones, and dedicated them as a lasting memorial of the divine mercy and faithfulness; “that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord is mighty.”

If ever these ancient words had deeply affected Elijah, and inspired his mind with renewed vigor, it must surely have been now, when his own situation, in many rejects, so strikingly resembled that of his forefathers. If those massy stones were still remaining as in all probability they were, how must he have felt at the sight of them! He also might have erected his Ebenezer near them, and have consecrated it with tears of sweet and humble thankfulness. For how frequently had he himself been led by the hand of the Almighty through an overflowing Jordan!

The prophet has now completed his pilgrimage. He knows it by a Divine revelation. The horses of fire and the flaming chariot stand already prepared behind the clouds to fetch him away; nor has the Lord concealed from him the distinguished manner in which he is about to be taken home. He therefore goes from Gilgal to Bethel to bid a last farewell to his disciples as to his dear children. He hoped to have made this journey alone; but scarcely had he taken his staff, when Elisha appears ready to join him. However much he wished to be alone at this time, he loved his faithful friend too dearly to reject his society at once.

They therefore set out together; but they had not gone on long before Elijah is unable to conceal his desire for solitude. He therefore says to him, “Tarry here, I pray you for the Lord hath sent, me to Bethel.” But no; Elisha cannot this time accede to the wish of his venerable master. “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth,” replied he, “I will not leave thee;” and they proceed together on their way. Twice again, at Bethel and at Jericho, Elijah repeats his request with increasing urgency, “Tarry here, pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan.” But all such entreaties were of no avail. Elisha persisted in affirming, “I will not leave thee.” This urgent wish, of Elijah to be alone is not difficult to explain. He knew what a great distinction the Lord intended for him, such as from the beginning of the world had never been conferred on any saint of God but once; and what was even Enoch’s triumph compared with that of Elijah? Elijah was not only to be translated into heaven by a way which passed not through the gates of death, but this translation was also to take place visibly, with a glory never before witnessed. A whirlwind was to accompany it; nay, a fiery chariot from another world was provided to fetch the prophet home. He probably knew the day and the hour when this would occur. Only consider this deliberately, and you will be ready to wonder that he did not sink under the weight of such an expectation.

How must he have felt, when, lifting up his eyes to the heavens, he would say to himself, “In a few days I shall be passing through those heavens into the very presence of the Lord, where I shall see all the ancient fathers-Abel and Enoch, Methuselah and Melchizedek, and the father of the

faithful, and Moses, and the psalmist, the man after God's own heart, and dwell among them forever. Where I shall behold the King of kings and Lord of lords, even the Lord himself!"

Is it any wonder, that in the midst of such thoughts, even the company of his dearest friend was too much for him? Especially when he reflected that he was a poor sinner, having many faults and infirmities, how must such reflections have induced him to seek to be alone with his God. He had had much spiritual experience since he had been employed in the Lord's service; but surely never could his thoughts have been so extraordinary as at present. What wonder was it he should wish to pour out his soul alone with God?

The vessel of a human bosom was too narrow for it, though it were the bosom of a friend. How much had he to reflect upon, to confess, to mourn over; and how much cause too for thanksgiving and praise! Whether Elisha comprehended this we know not. He would certainly have done his master an acceptable service had he complied with his request and remained behind. Nothing however could induce him to do so. He was firmly resolved not to leave him.

Humility also appears to have influenced Elijah on this occasion in wishing to decline the company of his friend. He appears to have desired to conceal his approaching triumph even from Elisha himself, lest any glory should be given to the creature rather than the Creator. Let us here blush at ourselves! For how vain are we apt to be of our own little distinctions!

Not so Elijah, that eminent man of God. Honorable indeed are those persons in God's sight, who are thus humble in their own. O that there were more such truly modest and humble characters among professed Christians! It is qualities like these which find favor even with then converted world.

Thrice-at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho-did Elijah, with increasing importunity, entreat his companion to leave him; the Lord having directed him first to one place and then to another. Thrice does Elijah receive the same concise and decided reply, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

Elijah was therefore obliged to yield to the determination of his friend.

And doubtless he was the more ready to acquiesce in it, as he might infer, from Elisha's language, that the Lord had revealed to him the secret of his approaching exaltation, and that he had received divine direction to accompany his departing master to the borders of Jordan, perhaps that he might afterwards be able to bear testimony of this wonder to the world.

We have good reason to suppose that this was the case, and that it was this which induced him to say, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

The great and glorious things which the Lord performs amongst men must not be hidden in a corner. In due time they must be published upon the housetops, and contribute to make known the honor of Him who will fill heaven and earth with his glory. Hence it often happens that he places secret witnesses about his children, even where they think themselves unobserved by any human eye. Thus many a pious spirit enters heaven, supposing that no one knew anything of his life and experience, and even ignorant himself of the glory which God had shed around him. But after such persons have left this world, everything comes to light; the Lord removes the veil which concealed their real character, and it is made known to the praise of his grace, as well as for the

encouragement of surviving brethren, how mighty the power of God was in their weakness, and how much the Lord had accomplished in them and through them.

Hence the memory of the just becomes blessed even on earth, and they live in the affectionate recollections of many. “Their works do follow them.” They leave a sweet savor here below, and cheer and animate many surviving imitators. Such characters of two individuals lately deceased well known to many of you-the worthy Jaeniké of Berlin, and the faithful Krafft of Cologne. How many admirable things respecting both these persons have come to light since their departure!

What a number of the loveliest actions of their lives did we hear for the first time at their graves! O, I hope there are still many amongst us, who, like Abel, will begin to speak loudest when dead; and who at present have the fairest and brightest side of their life “hid with Christ in God.”

II. Elijah and Elisha went on from Gilgal together Their course was directed first to the little town of Bethel. The sons of the prophets at Bethel went out to meet them; and the same thing happened when they arrived at Jericho. These were remarkable and highly gratifying occurrences especially at a time when faith seemed almost extinct in Israel, and “the ways of Zion mourned.”

God had reserved to himself the education and instruction of the people of Israel. In their divinely-appointed institutions we see the ground-plans and models, according to which the Almighty, in the jubilee or millennial age of his kingdom, will call into being that grand renovation which awaits the earth and all that is upon it, whether animate or inanimate. And as in the history of this distinguished people all the institutions of human society find their best models; so do those of instruction in particular.

Scholastic institutions, according to the modern system, Israel certainly does not appeal have known, at least until the Babylonish captivity. But instead of these, home and school were one, and in the place of hireling lips, instruction was poured forth from the tender hearts of father and mother. The child learnt to lisp the name of the Lord under the vine and the fig-tree, before the door of the peaceful dwelling.

- There the sacred histories of antiquity, recounted with the eloquence of affection, passed before its admiring soul.

- There the ideas of God and of the great ends of human life were gradually impressed upon the tender mind.

- There it early learnt that which is eternally true and beautiful, and good for the human mind to know.

And this was learnt, in the animated imagery of sacred historic record, by many an Israelitish child, almost before it had become conscious that its years of tuition had arrived. Thus it was pleasantly initiated into Israel’s wisdom, hopes, and prospects, and guided into a way of thinking, feeling, and anticipating, which penetrated upwards through the clouds of heaven, and forwards through the bounds of time.

Having enjoyed the benefit of such a popular education in the highest sense of the word, many a young Israelite came forth from the paternal dwelling, vigorous in body and in mind, with an eye open to everything that is worth observing; susceptible, like good ground, of the best cultivation;

and carrying in his hand, from his very home, the key of Scripture, of history, and of nature.

The stars of heaven, the trees and flowers of the field preached to him; and the instructive voices of the Levites and prophets, which were constantly heard through the country, found in his mind a quick and vivid echo.

Now, if among these youths there was one who was pressed in spirit to penetrate deeper into the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and to search after wisdom from above, as the vocation of his life, and to become a teacher of Israel; the schools of the prophets, which, since the time of Samuel, appear as the fairest blossoms of Israelitish history, were open to receive him. These were a kind of missionary seminaries of a superior order; and owed their origin chiefly to the contrast of a mournful state of ecclesiastical declension and moral disorder.

The decrepid character of the superannuated priest Eli, surrounded by his degenerate sons clearly indicates the state of things at that period. Such were the persons who ought to have been crown of the nation and the guardians of the sanctuary. A speedy and powerful remedy was therefore requisite, to prevent the moral degeneracy from becoming universal. This remedy God sent in the person of Samuel, who shines as a bright luminary in those gloomy days.

With his appearance commences a new epoch in the history of the Old Testament church. He united in himself the offices of judge, prophet and priest; at a happy moment he put his hand to the helm of the nation, and, and was the means of preserving it from destruction. By him those seminaries of the prophets appear to have been first set on foot, which contained the promise of better things in Israel, and served as a security to the well-being of the country.

Also, in ministering to that righteousness which exalteth a nation, it probably furnished it with a succession of able counselors and leaders. For this purpose he appears to have gathered about him companies of pious, intelligent, and studious young men, who were called the sons of the prophets; who also became Israel’s brightest ornament and the repository of her intellectual treasures.

The Scriptures mention four of these interesting seminaries: two in the time of Samuel; one at Kirjath-jearim, where the ark of the covenant was kept at that time, 1 Samuel 10:5; 1 Samuel 10:10; another at Ramah, where Samuel is expressly mentioned as “appointed over them,” 1 Samuel 19:18-24; and two more in the time of Elijah and Elisha, at Jericho and at Bethel.

There were, probably, other such seminaries established by Elijah at Samaria, Gilgal, and elsewhere. There, or very near these towns, were settled, as little colonies, these servants of the Lord; the unmarried ones, as it should seem, in one housekeeping together, and the rest in families apart at their own cottages. The pupils of these establishments had to maintain themselves by their labor as husbandmen or mechanics.

This was not thought strange in Israel, much less contemptible. Indeed it has ever been the practice of that nation to teach their children some trade, even though they might be destined to learning and sacred offices. Many of their most respected rabbis have been even surnamed according to their civil professions, as “Rabbi Judah, the baker;” “Rabbi Isaac, the smith;” “Rabbi Johanan, the shoemaker,” &c. Nor was it ever imputed to Paul or to Aquila, by their enemies, as anything degrading, that, besides their ministerial office, they were tentmakers.

That the sons of the prophets understood and carried on such occupations, is evident from 2 Kings 6:4, where we find them with the ax and tools, cheerfully engaged in constructing their wooden dwellings.

The study which chiefly occupied these sons of the prophets, was doubtless that of the word; and the tongues of their teachers were as “the pen of a ready writer.” Their instructions were certainly something else than what passes for theological learning and knowledge in the present day. Undoubtedly they were employed upon the positive meaning and practical import of revelation.

If sacred history were the subject of their discourse, it was doubtless for the purpose of tracing, in some edifying manner, the footsteps of the Lord; or of concluding from things past those which were future. Then the mysteries Aaronic priesthood and of the ceremonial law, we may suppose, formed another subject of instruction in the schools of the prophets. Thus the bleeding Lamb of God, that was to bear and take away the sins of the world, might be presented to them in exposition of the sacrificial institutions. Certainly we find such things pointed at by David in Psalms 51:1-19.

Moreover, as their religious and civil codes were intermingled, especially under the theocracy, The one would not be studied without the other; neither can we well suppose that the cultivation of their own language would be neglected, especially as it was the most sacred tongue in the world.

Their studies would also be connected with devotion, very differently from the popular studies of modern days. The spirit would be sought and not merely the letter. The depths of true wisdom would be sounded; and thus, treasures of things new and old would be brought forth by sanctified intellects.

The special employments, however, in which the sons of the prophets are exhibited to us in Scripture history, are those of prophecy and sacred song. In 1 Samuel 10:1-27, we find a whole company of such disciples meeting Saul on the hill of God, near Kirjath-jearim, with “a psaltery, a tablet, a pipe, and a harp” before them, and themselves prophesying. And, in 1 Samuel 19:1-24, we see king Saul, on another occasion, at Ramah, meeting an assembly of the sons of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel set over them.

It is evident, from both these passages, that the art of sacred melody was diligently cultivated in those retired nurseries of whatever was lovely and of good report; and that this art was devoted, according to its original appointment, to the praise of God, and the cheering and beautifying of civil and domestic life. Ancient traditions tell us much of the great attainments of these sons of the prophets in the lovely art of sacred song, and how affectingly they thus poured forth the harmony of their souls. By what is called their prophesying in I Samuel 10, and elsewhere, we understand an outpouring of the language of the heart in song or in praise, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit and these effusions we must conclude to have been always of the sublimest and holiest nature.

Now, if the final object of these excellent schools was not precisely to form prophets and seers-for such the Lord alone forms and calls-yet the Lord was pleased to have ready such assemblies of his saints, from which, when he saw good, he might select a messenger for himself, endowed with all human preparatives, whenever these were deemed requisite.

It is highly probable that most of the prophets proceeded from these institutions; the shepherd Amos seems to point out his to the office as an exception to the rule, he says, in Amos 7:14, “I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was a herdman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and said to me, Go prophesy unto my people Israel.”

These institutions at least, provided the country with many enlightened teachers, many worthy, well-instructed, and faithful heads of families, and judges. And, even had they not done so, still their very existence answered a high and holy purpose. They were the depositories of Israelitish light and justice; they shone as luminaries in a crooked and perverse nation; and reproved apostasy more severely by their example, than could have been done by the most powerful language.

Their quiet but mighty influence served to oppose the inroads of surrounding heathen darkness. They were also a spiritual asylum wherein spiritual mourners might find instruction, comfort, and peace. And who shall say what streams of living waters, from those fountains of Israel, refreshed and fertilized the country at large.

O my brethren! What sorrow fills my heart retiring from the picture of these ancient and piously devoted seminaries back into our own times, to contemplate the establishments for instruction which modern wisdom has devised and boasts of.

O ye sons of Israel, how much better were ye provided for than most of our youth in the present day! And yet we honor ourselves as CHRISTIANS! Where are institutions at present to be found, in which another spirit rules than that of the world and the profane? Where can we behold flourishing seminaries in which a Christian’s hope for his children would flourish also? Alas, they do but rarely, very rarely indeed exist; notwithstanding our systems of education, those boasts of the age we live in. In what, then consists the vaunted perfection of such systems?

Is it in those fragments of classical literature which are crammed into our youths;

Or in those ornamental accomplishments to which our daughters are made to sacrifice their health and mental cultivation. Or is it in the almost general separation of modern instruction from the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation? Or is it in the more popular manner in which individual branches of knowledge are treated, apart from all deeper investigation, apart from their general connection, and, above all, apart from the knowledge of God as their chief end and perfection?

Or does the excellence of our modern education consist in purely heathenish conceptions of liberty, morality, and justice, as accredited to our youth in many seminaries, by blind leaders who never study the sacred oracles with half the diligence, zeal, and respect with which they study the basic writers of ancient Greece and Rome?

And here I cannot refrain from inserting the remark of an enlightened writer upon the present state of education in Germany. “Education,” he says, “is become a system of seduction. Young men, and even schoolboys and apprentices, are trained into instruments of faction and rebellion, and are found the most active associates of tumult and revolt in the present day.

Yes, the most audacious blasphemies and execrations are uttered in the eats of listening youths, and even of children, against clergy, magistrates, and public institutions, while the minds of the young are thus easily excited, and drink in these iniquities like water.”

A monstrous ignorance of the Word of God, an affecting and deplorable want of scriptural knowledge, exists far and wide; for, during the last thirty years, our youths have been beguiled of all the blessings of holy things in our public and private seminaries; yes, in our very universities; and those who have most distinguished themselves in perpetrating these spiritual robberies have become the most reputable, popular and best rewarded.

The most vapid and superficial talking passes for religious and moral instruction; and school books full of subtle omissions, or of the most daring attacks upon religion, are introduced by authority. Instruction in history, that memorial of divine justice and human sins, commonly abused to the implanting of national pride, and the dissemination of the most pernicious principles and doctrines.

If we do not yet find this gloomy description fully realized everywhere, we have to ascribe exclusively to an invisible watcher, who has hitherto set bounds to the floods of Belial. Let us commend to Him, who still cherishes thoughts of peace towards us, and not of evil, our places of tuition both high and low; may he reform, consecrate and renew them!

It is true that greater importance has been attached in some places to religious instruction, and the hours devoted to it have been doubled. But this alone will not cure the evil. Another spirit is wanting in our schools and seminaries to complete, animate and sanctify every branch of instruction.

We ought, therefore, to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ; and, God be thanked! We never shall seek it in vain. We have Divine promises in abundance, which encourage us to look forward, in prayer, for better days. Particularly would I refer you to that prophecy of Zechariah, which shall assuredly come to pass, “In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.” (Zechariah 14:20-21).

What a glorious prospect is here presented to us of the future condition of the church and of the world! The beauty and luster of holiness shall hen be spread over all we possess, and over all that surrounds us. The Spirit of the Lord shall be universally diffused, and every object will partake of a Divine consecration. The sciences will then be the handmaidens of religion, and their alpha and omega will be the glory of God in Christ. The arts will return to their primary destination, and be again devoted to the service of the living God. “I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time.”

III. It must have been gratifying to Elijah

to behold these sons of the prophets

They were coming forth to meet him, and to hear, from their voices, an echo to his own ardent prayers, which, when his faith was weak, he had supposed to have no counterpart. It must have increased his own self-humiliation to witness such green spots still remaining in their moral desert, whereas he had thought the prophets all slain, and himself standing quite alone in Israel. He would now feel self-abased at the distrust he had expressed respecting the success of his labors.

For here, notwithstanding the malignant influence of an Ahab and a Jezebel, and the apostasy of a whole nation, these blooming plantations of truth had thriven amidst storm and tempest in those

parts of the country where Satan's seat had more especially been set up.

It must have cheered the heart of the prophet to associate, with his hope of heavenly glory, the thought of leaving behind him such goodly bands of champions in the service of the God of Israel.

On his coming with Elisha to Bethel, the sons of the prophets are already aware of the loss that awaits them. Probably the Lord himself had made it known to them. With such feelings, as on this occasion, they had never before saluted their paternal master.

How much did they need to establish their hearts in order to suppress all rising turbulence of feeling! For a delicate sense of propriety told them they ought not to let the master perceive that they knew of his approaching removal. They venture to disclose only to Elisha the secret of their mournfully afflicted souls, whilst beckoning him aside, and whispering with a trembling voice into his ear, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away master from thy head to-day?"

But Elisha, as if putting a still stronger seal upon their lips, signified to them that they should keep the matter to themselves. "Yea, I know it," said he softly to them; "hold ye your peace!" This happened at Bethel and the same thing was repeated at Jericho.

These are pleasing scenes, extremely delicate and characteristic. Surely, even in the kingdom of God, there is something which the world calls discretion, and this must at least be reckoned amongst the odors and beauties which Sharon's roses and lilies shed around them.

~ end of chapter 21 ~

02.22. The Passage Through Jordan

The Passage Through Jordan CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“The king’s daughter is all glorious within.” In these sublime words the inspired psalmist speaks of the true church of God on earth. Psalms 45:13.

A Christian is the highest style of man, however little the world may be of this opinion. “The World,” as it cannot receive the Holy Spirit, so neither can it comprehend that which is Divinely great and glorious; consequently it knows not how to appreciate the nature and actions of him who is born of God.

There is something sublimely great in the gift of true repentance; for true repentance is an open rupture with sin and with Satan. There is something great in truly Christian desires; for it is the Supreme Good alone that is able fully to satisfy them.

There is something noble in truly Christian prayers; for in these the Christian speaks from his heart to God his Father, and treads the world beneath his feet. Great also are the hopes of the real Christian; for they embrace nothing less than a participation of the glory of the Divine Redeemer.

Even godly sorrow has a greatness in it, as working repentance unto salvation not to be repented of; and as originating in regret at the loss or absence of what is invaluably great and good. And if the sorrow, then also the joy of the true Christian is great; and at times amounts to “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” even in this world, because it is “joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Much more might be added concerning the intrinsic excellence of him who possesses it; so true is it that “the king’s daughter,” the church, “is all glorious within.”

And in the eminent servants of God this inward excellency and glory is much greater and more admirable than the most splendid scenes and actions of their outward life. Indeed the grand events of their external history almost cease to be surprising, when we consider the dignity and elevation of their inward characters.

Let us bear this in mind, while we reflect a little upon the miraculous act with which we see the prophet Elijah concluding his wonderful course.

“And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground” (2 Kings 2:7-8).

We now follow this master in Israel from those precious plantations, the schools of the prophets, to the banks of the Jordan. Let us contemplate, for a few moments, I. The escort of the sons of the prophets;

II. The passage of Elijah and his companion through the river Jordan.

I. Here, in the wilderness of Jericho, where Israel's hosts

first trod the soil of the promised land, Elijah and Elisha

pass on together, and arrive at the brink of Jordan

Fifty men of the sons of the prophets followed them at a distance, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. These sons of the prophets could not find in their hearts to stay that day in the town.

It was their master's parting-day, during which they might still see him, but for the last time. They felt, as it were, constrained to follow him, to behold him once more. They were sensible that no common loss awaited them. A loss which they had then as much reason to regret, as we should at present have to rejoice, if it pleased the Lord to favor this age with a man like him.

We cannot doubt that these sons of the prophets, in expecting their master to be taken away, anticipated that he would be translated to happiness. So that, sorrowful as they must have been to part with him, their sorrow must have been strangely mingled with joy at the thought of his triumphant exit. O how true is this also of the surviving Christian friends of every departing saint!

And how indescribably heart-rending is it, on the contrary, to see any beloved object going out of the world, without a well-grounded expectation of this good exchange! Truly the most valuable thing which our dying relatives can leave us, is a scriptural hope and confidence that they have fallen asleep in Jesus. We then no longer regard them as lost, but contemplate them as heirs with us of the future glorious resurrection.

It does not appear that the sons of the prophets were witnesses of the ascension of Elijah to heaven. We cannot venture to say, with certainty, why this transporting sight was withholden from them. But it is easy to conclude, with respect to ourselves, why we are not made acquainted with all those circumstances of triumph which departed saints enjoy. For we should then so languish for our own expected blessedness, as to be unfit for the duties of the life that now is. The present constitution of our nature cannot bear to become familiar with more than what faith is able to realize from the Word of God. It is therefore an instance of the divine wisdom and goodness, that more than this is for the present withholden from us, and that darkness and the shadow of death are suffered to intercept the glories of the invisible world, and to attemper us to a patient continuance in this land of exile and sorrow.

That the sons of the prophets stood afar off, and did not advance nearer their departing master, is beautifully characteristic. They knew their spiritual father too well not to be aware that he was not desirous of any host of human witnesses at his approaching glorification, and they possessed sufficient delicacy of feeling not to intrude themselves upon him.

O that among ourselves this more refined, spiritual decorum were less rare than it appears to be! There are many cases in which such delicacy is peculiarly appropriate; but persons in general are unhappily not acquainted with it. If, for example, we perceive the influence of Divine grace beginning to show itself in some person eminent for rank or talents, here is a case which calls for much holy discretion on our part. We ought to observe the thing as though we observed it not, and keep it amongst us as a pleasing secret; and if one or another should tell us of it, it ought to be said, as at Jericho and Bethel, "Yea, I know it; hold thou thy peace."

Such persons, especially at their first setting out, must be dealt with discreetly, and the more so in proportion to the degree in which the fashion of this world has hitherto influenced them, and in which they have moved high in society; for should it come to the ears of such persons that the report of their conversion is bandied abroad, it would naturally make them shrink back, and thus tend to retard them considerably in the way of grace. But it is too common to disregard all this, and to forget that a shoot just springing up requires very different treatment from a full grown tree.

A variety of cases, wherein such delicacy on our part is required, might be mentioned here. But it is not difficult to understand, that what is called in the world “refinement,” may well have its counterpart in the kingdom of God; and that there is a nice attention to feeling and social decorum which well befits the sons and daughters of Zion.

II. Elijah having arrived with his companion at the brink of Jordan does

not tarry there as if he doubted how he was to pass over the river

He had not forgotten Moses, who, with one stroke of his rod, parted asunder the water of the great deep, that the ransomed of the Lord might pass over; nor could he forget that Moses’ God was also Elijah’s God.

A miracle similar to that of Moses now ensues. What a spectacle! The stream is divided. On one side it flows rapidly away; on the other it piles itself up like a wall of crystal, and the two prophets pass over, dryshod, to the opposite shore. As soon as they are over, lo! The watery heaps rush again down the channel, the invisible bounds are removed, and the unfettered stream has flowed on ever since in its ordinary course.

How great a God is our God, who ruleth so absolutely in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and who doeth whatsoever pleaseth him! At his rebuke the seas dry up, and well-watered land become a desert; the winds and the sea obey him. Happy the man whose refuge is in Him! Yes, whosoever hath this Rock of Israel for his strength, all things must tend to his salvation, even though it be against their natural tendency to do so. With this God we leap over every wall, and faith in his name removes mountains of difficulty out of the way.

The dividing of Jordan formed the last in the chain of wonders which ran through the prophetic course of Elijah; and it serves to show that this man, with all his trials and fatigues, had not become decrepid in his faith, but held fast and maintained the beginning of his confidence stedfast unto the end. This last honor put upon Elijah’s faith, might serve a variety of valuable purposes.

- It might serve to invigorate and encourage the faith, and promote the honor of his successor who accompanied him.

- It might serve the same purpose also, to the sons of the prophets, who stood afar off, but saw the miracle.

- It might serve as a new sign to the whole people, a further demonstration that there had been a prophet of the Lord in the midst of them.

To Elijah himself it might serve as another gracious visitation from his God, another memento of his faithfulness and truth; and with respect to ourselves, surely it serves to remind us that the Lord

is with his people even to the end. This act of the departing prophet resembled the ruby splendor of the evening sky, which tells us that the sun, though it has vanished from our view, is not extinguished, but only departed to shine in another hemisphere.

Elijah's passage over Jordan, while it reminds us of that of his forefathers over the same stream, seems far to excel it. At the passage of the Israelitish host, what solemn arrangements and preparations were made for it!

Here there was, so to speak, an acting impromptu, and how rapid was it! There, the Ark of the Covenant was sent before, while the people followed at a measured distance; and it was only before the tabernacle of the Almighty that the waters yielded; here they yield before a folded mantle in a human hand.

Had the Israelites, who passed over under Joshua, witnessed this wondrous act of Elijah, with what astonishment would they have beheld it! Would they not have confessed the Lord as dwelling in very deed with man? And yet in this honor put upon Elijah, there was but a faint representation of that which God has reserved for the children of the New Testament dispensation.

When Elijah folded his mantle together to smite the waters of Jordan, he already seemed to anticipate a princely dominion over the earth and its elements. This act of his faith seems the effort of a soul aspiring to higher degrees of advancement, to full emancipation and liberty. He seems no longer to know anything of bondage to the elements of this world. He appears like one advanced to the dignity of a seat in the heavenly places with Christ; his faith would cast mountains into the sea and pile up the sea to mountains were it necessary.

What is miraculous in the eyes of man, appears to have become almost familiar to his faith. A new region must shortly be opened to his soul, for which this earth has become too narrow and contracted. Ye heavens unfold! Ye boundaries of earth and time retire, for his abode is no longer below.

Elisha's spirit, too, must have been strengthened and refreshed by all this that he witnessed and experienced at the side of his master. And here it may be observed that those who are especially honored of God, in any age of the world, are thus honored for the benefit of others around them, quite as much as for their own. From the divine answer given to their prayers, our faith and confidence may learn to ascend with theirs on high.

When they, in the night of their adversity, have new songs put into their mouths, is it not the spirit of joy may take possession of us also, and that we may not succumb under our worldly cares?

When they pass in triumph through the valleys of the shadow of death, how is such a sight adapted to encourage us, and to raise us higher on the vantage ground of faith! They seem almost to bear us away with them in their noble career. And, reference to the peculiar times in which we live, let us remember that it is the Lord God of Elijah, who ruleth all things in the person of Jesus Christ, who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

He too has promised that a time shall arrive when the weakest shall be as David and the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord before his people. Zechariah 12:8. "Yea," saith the Lord, "I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph; and they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine; yea, their children shall see it

and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord” (Zechariah 10:6-7).

Such honor have all his saints. Blessed are they that wait for him! Amen.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

02.23. The Great Request

The Great Request CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

We come now to behold Elijah arrived just at the consummation of his life of faith, and anticipating the perfect enjoyment of that glorious liberty which is the future inheritance of all the children of God.

“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so” (2 Kings 2:9-10). The sacred narrative has brought us to the boundary of Elijah’s earthly course. We have the last words and his last work; a work indeed less evident to the senses than his former acts; but not inferior, perhaps more astonishing than those. The several matters which at present require our attention are;

I. The position after crossing the river II. Elijah’s proffer to Elisha;

III. The request of the latter, with the answer he received to it.

I. Elijah, whom we here behold beyond Jordan, may,

spiritually considered, be regarded as now placed

beyond the limits of sublunary evils and sorrows

These things, like the waters of Jordan, now lie behind him. His eternal sabbath of rest is just at hand, and the remaining few moments of his earthly sojourn are now only a blessed waiting for the heavenly chariot.

What an enviable situation! And yet it is in substance the same with that into which the Gospel ought already to have brought us all! Whatever depths or difficulties we still anxiously behold lying before us, if we were only in the vigorous exercise of a true and lively faith; we might easily surmount them all, and spiritually leave them behind us. For faith substantiates what is hoped for, and evidences the things which are not seen.

What is it that makes us tremble?

- Is it even the waves of death itself? Let us embark only in the sweet promise of the Saviour, “I will come again and receive you to myself,” and we have already surmounted these.

- Is it the storm of temptation? Let us commit the keeping of body, soul and spirit to Him who has promised that he “will not suffer us to be tempted above what are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it;” and the severest and most violent temptations will thus become powerless to us.

- Does the remainder of our innate corruptions dismay us, so that we are ready to ask, How shall we become perfectly holy? Let us reflect that Christ is “made of God unto as wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

- Are we disposed to entertain anxious presentiments of temporal and spiritual troubles? Let us remember that each day is ordered by almighty and everlasting Love, and brings with it that measure of the bitter and the sweet, which, according to the judgment of infinite Wisdom, is most conducive to our true peace and welfare.

Ye see then, brethren, what glorious prospects are placed before us by Divine revelation, and how real they are to every sincere member of Christ. So that all such may securely look beyond the Jordan of death, beyond all the intermediate wilderness toils and temptations of their way, as if they were already there.

Yes, those whose hearts are set upon gaining, by divine strength, a complete victory over their innate corruptions, may rest assured of their final triumph, and say with the Psalmist, “I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psalms 17:15).

II. When the two men of God were gone over Jordan,

“Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for

thee, before I be taken away from thee” This was something more than an affectionate parting word. He wished to communicate to him his last paternal blessing, and this no common one; “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.” These are great words!

But what kind of benefit did Elijah intend? Was it some valuable temporal good? Was it a large grant of worldly riches, honors, or gratifications? O no; he was thinking of good and perfect gifts that come down from above, from the Father of lights, Elisha is, therefore, invited to ask for blessings from the sanctuary; and here we discern a radiance of the glory of the New Testament in the Old. Bold as this expression is, “Ask what I shall do for thee,” it was perfectly appropriate to the condition of the inspired prophet at that time, for he was evidently favored with an extraordinary outpouring of prophetic grace.

The words, however, of this address to Elisha serve to remind us of the words of our Lord to his disciples: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you: hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

You know what is commonly understood by praying in the name of Jesus. People say, they pray in his name, when they so present their requests before God as not to hope for acceptance on ground of their own worthiness, but on that of the merits of Christ and from free grace. They say, that to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in humble acknowledgment of our own entire unworthiness of any claim on divine help, and to hope for it from the tender mercy of God through the merits and blood of Jesus Christ.

Is this explanation the true and correct one? It is not exactly incorrect, but it is defective and imperfect. A person may really pray with the state of heart just described, and yet not pray fully in the name of Jesus. For if this expression signified nothing more than to pray, confiding in the

merits of the Surety, why did Christ say to his disciples, “Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name?”

If the Saviour would have had nothing more to be understood by praying in his name, than to pray as a contrite sinner, trusting in the merits of the Redeemer, then Abraham, Moses, Daniel, David, and others had certainly already prayed in the name of Jesus. But praying in the name of Jesus is here presented to us as something entirely new. The Saviour himself speaks of it as a thing which was not known previous to his appearing upon earth, and it must therefore be regarded as one of the chief privileges of the New Testament dispensation.

If, in the painful consciousness of my desert of condemnation, I approach the eternal Father in prayer, and set Christ before me as my Mediator and Surety, regarding God only as a consuming fire, and considering that without Christ’s mediation I should certainly be consumed before Him-have I not then learnt the full import of praying in the name of Jesus? No, not if I consider the Father as still strange and distant with respect to me, and that I am protected only by Christ from his wrath; for then I am in the bondage of fear before the God of all grace.

I ought to approach the Father with a firm belief that I am welcome to come to him in Jesus Christ; and that if I truly loathe myself for all my transgressions, and thus make confession to him, then my sins and iniquities are remembered no more. Here then may very suitably be applied to me the spirit and import of those words which he spake to his disciples: “And I say not that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father loveth you, because ye have loved me, and hath believed that I came out from God.”

Let me then learn to cast all my care upon Him, fully assured that in Christ I am not merely saved, through him, from wrath, but am also numbered among “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Surely, to pray in the knowledge and belief of all this, is something more than to pray to an offended God with a cold reliance, from necessity, on the merits of Jesus. We all know, that to do anything in the name of another person is in some sense to represent that person; so that if you prefer a request in my name, and you are refused, this would amount to a disparagement of me. For it is not in reality so much you that ask, as I. If the request be granted, it is from the respect of belonging to and paid to me, that any such request is granted to you. This precisely is the case with respect to asking in Christ’s name. Every answer to our prayers is primarily an answer to the intercession of Christ for us, and in him it is that we are accepted, answered, and blessed.

Now, he that is enabled, by faith of the operation of God, to bring his requests before God with a filial boldness; not doubting that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us-such a one prays in the name of Jesus.

Now, the disciples not yet prayed exactly thus. Their insight into the mediatorship of Christ had never yet reached so far as to enable them to draw nigh to God in “full assurance of faith.”

Indeed the condition of most of the Old Testament saints, in relation to God, though the same in substance, appears to have come far short of this in degree. They knew that, for the Messiah’s sake, they should not be condemned; yea, they knew much more than this, and in so far they rejoiced in their redemption. But not many of them appear to have anticipated that fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, which was brought fully to light by the Gospel. They had not come to “mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem,” but had come rather to “the mountain that

might be touched, and that burned with fire." Even of the most eminent of them it is written, that though they died in faith, "having obtained a good report through faith," as yet "they received not the promise" (Hebrews 11:39.

Nor ought we here to overlook the largeness of the promise which our blessed Saviour makes to his true disciples.

- "Ask, and ye shall receive; that your joy may be full."

- And again, "Whatsoever Yc shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

- "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

And to such a promise as this he solemnly prefixes the asseveration, "Verily, verily," or "Amen, amen." What can we desire more? Nothing in the world is so great, nothing so small, that we might not every moment be receiving from the Father, if we only asked it in the name of Jesus. Say, what would ye desire to have granted you? Is it to be freed from domestic troubles; as, for instance, that your sick child should recover? Would you gladly see your whole household drawn to God?

Ask for any such thing in Jesus' name, and be assured that he will grant it you. But does not experience seem to contradict this? We answer, it does not really do so. The deceit lies within ourselves, through not really asking in Jesus' name. For let us again call to mind what this asking in his name implies.

You might wish very ardently, it is true, for some peculiar interposition of God; and you might express this wish in prayer, and, as you think, in Jesus' name. But in this it is possible that you may be mistaken. A petition is offered in his name when it is offered in that faith which is of the operation of God, and when that which we ask is according to his will.

Luther prayed for the lives of his friends, Melanchthon and Myconius, who were sick unto death, and already given over; and, lo, he received the petitions which he desired of God: and whatever we pray for, be it only gold or silver, even this may be granted us when asked for according to his will.

Thus the pious Professor Franke prayed for means to erect his orphan-houses; and immediately the silver and the gold flowed in upon him, and he who on commencing was scarcely able to command a few pence, had soon enough to found that abode of orphan charity and education, whose praise has been in all the churches. Here the Lord granted what his servant desired.

It is to this end that John addresses us, in his First Epistle - 1 John 3:21-23, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment."

What shall we say to these things? Alas! How little account do we make of such exceedingly great and precious promises! How lamentably is this shown by the low state of spiritual advancement in which most are contented to live! Were it otherwise, things would wear a very different appearance among us. The heavens would not so often be as brass over our heads, nor the earth beneath us

as iron. The church would soon flourish like the lily; there would be more shaking among the dry bones, and a gracious rain would oftener refresh God's inheritance.

Our low condition therefore at present, in spiritual things, is really our shame and our condemnation. It is still but too true of many among ourselves, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name."

But much as these mighty words reprove us, they also serve to encourage us; for they unfold a glorious prospect of better days to the church of Christ, whenever they shall generally unite in asking for a new and Pentecostal season, a general outpouring of the Spirit of grace and of supplications upon the Israel of God. This good work, we acknowledge, has begun to be engaged in by many a company of devout persons in various places. But as yet, comparatively speaking, such union of prayer in the name of Jesus is but partial. As soon as it shall be full, and general, and fervent among all real Christians, then will the fullness of the desired blessing he poured out.

The same kind of observation applies to individual blessings desired by us. Is it the conversion of a child, or a beloved relative? We too often lament over the condition of such, without ever fervently praying in the name of Jesus on their behalf. It is well worthwhile here, also, to be reminded of the duty of commending to God, in the name of Jesus, all our private cares.

Unbelief on the one hand, and spiritual pride on the other, are alike negligent of this. "What is the use of it?" says the former; "God can hardly be supposed to concern himself about my private matters." And it is the notion of the latter, "That because God does concern himself about them, therefore I need not do it; neither need I make such things a subject of prayer to him."

But be it remembered, that he has ordered prayer in the name of Jesus as the means of obtaining and receiving our blessings. This is evident from Scripture, and from the experience of all ages of the church. If we are truly alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we shall feel that we can never enough value the inestimable privilege of being thus permitted to ask and to received.

If we do not value such a privilege as this, it must be because we are still unrenewed and dead in spirit, or because we have backslidden or sunk into a lamentable state of sloth and lukewarmness.

It may here also be further observed, that such boldness and access, given us in prayer through the faith of Jesus Christ, throws light and evidence on that great truth, "that when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son; and that, being reconciled, we are made the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." For God, in thus answering our prayers, dealeth with us as with sons; hence the Saviour calls him "his Father, and our Father;" and he says, "As the Father hath loved me, even so have I loved you: continue ye in my love."

So much for one of the most glorious and significant expressions that ever proceeded from our Saviour's lips. We now return to our narrative.

III. The bold invitation to Elisha to ask what he would from the departing

prophet, indicates a state of heart towards God, which was substantially

the same with that we have now attempted to describe

Elijah already rises high in making such an offer; and Elisha seems to rise still higher in his expectation from it.

“I pray thee,” says he, “let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me;” that is, “I desire to be twice as much endued with the Holy Spirit, and enriched with his gifts, as thou hast been.”

Let us not mistake the worthy Elisha in his request; however lofty it may sound, it proceeds from a humble and holy spirit. I do not believe that Elisha was here referring, as many expositors suppose, to the birthright of the first born son, who inherited twice as much as his brothers and sisters, and that he only meant, “If others inherit a portion of thy spiritual gifts, let this portion be doubled to me, to whom thou hast been more especially a father.”

Surely, he rather had his eye upon the loss which Israel would sustain by his departure. This appeared to him immense; he thought that the earth contained no man at all comparable with Elijah. The idea that he, the inconsiderable husbandman of Abel Meholah, could fill up such a breach, or carry on the work of Elijah to its complete accomplishment, was overwhelming to him.

Therefore, if Elijah must depart, his successor would humbly implore sufficient help for his conscious inability. It seems then a feeling of purest humility and self-diffidence which dictated this request. Perhaps, also, he foresaw, by divine revelation, that his own future labors in Israel would be essentially different from those of his great predecessor, and would bear a more evangelical character.

After the mighty wind, the earthquake, and the fire, the still small voice of the Lord’s grace and lovingkindness was to succeed, and be conveyed through Elisha to Israel; for such a vocation he needed very peculiar endowments.

As he was to stand forth in the character of a messenger of the divine benignity, it was necessary that this peculiarity of his vocation should reflect itself in his whole conduct, and beam as it were in his countenance. Perhaps he felt this also, and therefore said, “Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me!”

But, however this may have been, he desired this blessing only in order the more effectually to glorify the Lord’s name. The more any servant of God is humble within himself, and lives by faith upon divine grace alone, the higher will his wishes for the glory of God naturally rise.

IV. To Elisha’s request Elijah answered, Thou hast asked a hard thing:

nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so

unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so” As if he had said, “It is no common favor that you ask; neither is it a favor that can be conferred on you the will of man; it is a rare vouchsafement, and such as few prophets ever have been, or ever will be distinguished with.”

The condition upon which Elijah, by Divine inspiration, made the grant to depend, is also remarkable. “If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.” If “thou see me at my departure, or in the act of departing;” as much as to say, “Do not expect the gift from me, but from Him, who is taking me away; moreover take notice of the sign which he appoints thee for ascertaining his will in this matter: for by this sign thou shalt understand

that the gift is purely of God's bestowal."

Let us conclude, with noticing the superlative bounty of the New Testament dispensation. You know how frequently, in the first age of the church, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word; and how the common members of the New Testament church were often gifted with power to perform the most stupendous miracles. And thus, as the apostle Peter tells us, has commenced the fulfillment of "that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath" (Acts 2:16-19).

How highly then should we value our privileges, as members of Christ, and partakers of the new dispensation, the heavenly calling! For behold how the glory of the Gospel surpasses everything that has preceded it! What are we that we should be thus favored! And "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" (2 Peter 3:11).

~ end of chapter 23 ~

02.24. The Ascension

The Ascension CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR The false and fashionable theology of the present day would not have occasioned the mischief it has done, had it not assumed so specious an appearance of adhering to the doctrines of the Gospel.

The bulk of the people were unable to see through such delusion, and thus the adversary, transformed into an angel of light, has, through his subtlety, corrupted their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ. Thus a Supreme Being is indeed set forth by them, but one with whom they would forbid us to hold communion. The revealed Son of God is by them refined into a personified idea, an unsubstantial image. Immortality and eternal life are spoken of also, but only so long as men are not in earnest in pressing after them. Alas, how is the apostolic warning forgotten, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit” (Colossians 2:8).

But let us have the realities of the Bible, for the human heart needs realities, and the more palpable and substantial to our faith they are, the better. We want the knowledge of an intelligible God; and God is only intelligible to sinful man by the Gospel, and by that manifestation of himself in our human nature which is revealed in the Scriptures.

- We want just such a knowledge of Divine Providence as is taught by Him who said, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

- We want a Divine Surety who, having obeyed, been judged and suffered in our stead, has made a perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

- We need a heavenly home into which we may be received, a kingdom which cannot be moved, a world more substantial than the present, which has become subject to vanity.

- We need a reunion of the soul with the body, changed indeed and glorified, but still the body, for it is a component part of man; and, previous and preparatory to all this, we need a real change of heart, a renewal of the soul by the Spirit of God.

Such are some of those realities which our necessities require, and which alone can satisfy our capacious desires of happiness. I say we want these realities to remedy other realities which force themselves upon us in our actual experience. For too real is the wretchedness which all men naturally and morally experience in the present life; disease and death await us; a body of sin oppresses and brings us low; conscious guilt confounds us; and nothing can avail to remedy all this but what ‘s actually opposed to it.

A paper shield gives no protection; the bread of dreams affords no support; we want the solid and substantial realities of divine revelation. There, and there alone are such realities to be discerned; and the more they are realized by our faith, the happier for us.

In the ascent of Elijah, which we are about to contemplate, we meet with one such solid demonstration of immortality and the life of the world to come.

“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11).

This passage of Scripture invites us, as it were, to a coronation, to witness an event most marvelous and most true.

The fact itself first requires our notice; and then its meaning and signification.

I. We see Elijah and Elisha passing on together in the country beyond Jordan

It was comparatively a solitary region. God did not select the marketplace of idlers for the scene of this wonder, but this secluded spot. While the two men of God thus walked on, engaged in holy conversation, “behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it.”

Well may we be astonished at beholding the glory and honor with which God thus crowns a poor sinner, for such is man “at his best estate” in this world. Let us however remember, that not “flesh and blood,” as such, that “entereth the kingdom of God; neither can corruption inherit incorruption.” It is not Elijah as born after the flesh, it is not the son of Adam, as such; but it is Elijah as born again of the Spirit, and as united to the second Adam, the Lord from heaven that is thus exalted.

The free grace of God towards sinners is that which reigns and triumphs here. What does this wonderful scene indicate, but that the Most High regards and treats as righteous all who believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. Behold here, then, the effect of the meritorious sacrifice of Christ. Learn, therefore, more impressively, from this event, the power of his mighty sacrifice for sin.

Such honor in substance, have all God’s saints. “What is it for Him to send from on high to fetch me,” (may every true Christian say,) “seeing he is willing to take me to his bosom as ‘the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.’”

He has in infinite wisdom and grace so ordered things, that it shall glorify his own holy name thus to deal with his obedient children. Having conformed them to the image of the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, it is a small thing with him thus to ratify their union with him forever.

We need not curiously inquire how Elijah, without dying, could be fit to be conveyed away, inasmuch as flesh and blood, in its present mortal and corrupt state, cannot enter into the kingdom of God. We are told of the mighty working of the Lord Jesus, “whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself,” and whereby he will change this body of humiliation, that it may be like unto his own glorious body; we are told that at the last day “we shall not all sleep, but that we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye:” and we may be quite sure that such a change as this now passed upon the body of Elijah. This is enough for our faith at present. His mortality was swallowed up of life, and his corruptible nature had put on incorruption.

It cannot further be described what his eye afterwards began to see, his ear to hear, and his heart to conceive. God, however, has reserved the knowledge and experience of all this for them that love him.

Blessed servant of God, how unspeakably and incomprehensible is now thy everlasting felicity; made glad as thou art with the joy of God's countenance! Here thou art gathered to thy fathers with honor, and beholdest Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and thyself numbered with them.

So then we have a patriarchal instance of complete triumph over death in the case of Enoch; an Israelitish instance of the same in the case of Elijah; and, to crown the whole, the New Testament account of our Lord and Saviour's resurrection and ascension; all serving to raise our faith to the certainty of a similar triumph. Let nothing therefore relative to death depress us. Let our faith in these truths become every day, by the grace of God, stronger and stronger; let us grow in gratitude and love, in obedience and patience, until our own faith also shall be swallowed up in vision, and our hope hope in enjoyment.

II. The wonderful event here recorded, is one of the most glorious,

significant, and exhilarating facts which the world ever

witnessed before the birth of Christ

It served to dispel much obscurity which might occasionally cloud the faith of dying saints under the Old Testament dispensation. It might also serve to cheer the minds of many of the faithful but oppressed or afflicted servants of God, in those days, during the course of their earthly pilgrimage. For they would recollect that Elijah too had been thus oppressed and afflicted, and yet how gloriously did he triumph at last!

Many a one, too, under deep conviction of sin, and whose faith could not always derive the comfort he needed from the typical sacrifices of the law, might have been preserved from despondency by remembering this honor visibly put upon one of the penitent sons of Adam, as an encouragement to all who were like-minded with him.

This event also served to prepare the faith of true Israelites for the wonders of the New Testament dispensation.

That prophetic invocation, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive," It would thus be rendered more susceptible of its grandest import in the minds of those who should afterwards wait from age to age for the consolation of Israel. The ascension too of Elijah was surely intended to prefigure that of our blessed Saviour. Yet it became him, as Lord of all, to ascend, not in a fiery chariot waiting upon him, but by a visible manifestation of his own Divine power. Hence it is only said, that "he was received up into heaven," that "while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven;" and that while the disciples "beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

Thus his ascension took place before men, in majestic simplicity and tranquility, which may doubtless be ascribed to its superior glory as compared with that of Elijah.

In all generations of mankind, the present world has been too narrow for the capacious desires of the human soul. Hence men in every nation, however barbarous, have endeavored, by one way and another, to pierce the veil that conceals from us the invisible world and a future state. This shows that the spirit of man feels, as it were, its own immortal nature, though it shows at the same

time our universal need of Divine revelation.

Cyrus, though a heathen, said at the approach of death, “I cannot imagine that the soul lives only while it remains this mortal body. I am rather inclined to think, that when separated from this body, it will possess more understanding and greater purity.”

Socrates, the prince of heathen philosophers, when about to die, could only say, “We part; I am going to die, and you to live. Which of us goes the best way is known to God alone!”

All that Cicero, the great and published Roman, could say upon this subject was, “I do not wish that what I am about to write of a duration of existence beyond the present life, should be regarded as certain, like a divine oracle. Upon this subject I entertain no more than conjecture.”

Neither have the wise of this world, in our own day, any better staff to lean upon, while they refuse to rest their hopes on the truths of divine revelation. Their belief in a future state, if they believe in it at all, is, in most cases, so barren and comfortless, that death is viewed by them, in their reflecting moments, as a formidable foe.

But it is the privilege of the Christian to exclaim in his severest sufferings, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” “We know,” says the apostle, (and how many have, able since to adopt his words as their own!) “that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

And if you ask the believer the source of this knowledge, he can refer you to the Son of God himself, who, when on earth, raised the dead to life by a word; yea, and in his own person rose again and ascended visibly into heaven; who said to his disciples, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Here then is the veil that hides the other world from the eye of sense removed entirely to the eye of faith, and we have only to behold, rejoice, and be glad at the glorious prospect thus opened before us by the Lord from heaven. And what he has thus revealed is plain and definite; which if we believe, we know in what we have believed. He shows us a house, a home, a heavenly paternal home; a peopled residence, a real habitation, where we shall know one another, and be with one another upon terms of the most intimate fellowship and the dearest friendship. For the expression “My Father’s house,” indicates family community, familiar intercourse, living with and in the presence of the Father.

O how invaluable is the possession already of such sure intelligence respecting our eternal habitation in the celestial world! And how quieting to the heart thus to know of a better country, that is, an heavenly, where peace forever reigns, where all is perfect harmony and love!

Thus we see that a reflected image of the Christian’s future glory is presented to us in the triumphant exaltation of Elijah, who was originally “a man of like passions as we are.” They who are Christ’s, who having crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, are seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, who set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth, and whose life is hid with Christ in God-have in themselves an earnest and pledge of their future union with their Lord in glory.

But Woe unto the impenitent and unbelieving, for it shall as certainly be ill with them! and this because the great salvation has been neglected, and the riches of Divine grace, and longsuffering, and goodness, and forbearance, have been despised.

Where this is the case, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, for it is to Christ's one sacrifice that Elijah and all the saints owe their triumph. God having "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

"Worthy" then is "the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!" Amen.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

02.25. The Parting

The Parting CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE Our Saviour, Mark 16:14, upbraided even own disciples with their unbelief: and what does he in general speak more strongly against? For unbelief is the occasion of all sin, and the very bond of iniquity. It does nothing but darken and destroy. It makes the world a moral desert, where no divine footsteps are heard-where no angels ascend and descend-where no living hand adorns the fields, feeds the fowls of heaven, or regulates events. Thus it makes nature, the garden of God, a mere automaton, and the history of Providence a fortuitous succession of events, and man a creature of accident, and prayer a useless ceremony. It annihilates even the vestiges of heaven that still remain upon earth, and stops the way to every higher region.

But faith sees an invisible world dawning upon the visible, and beholds this earth as a theatre of divine wonders. It everywhere traces the footsteps, operation, and government of the triune God. In the winds it sees messengers commissioned by Him; in the lightnings it beholds ministers sent forth in his service. It has eagles' wings for a worm in the dust, and opens the regions that He beyond us.

Unassisted by faith, the mind of man, however bold may be its flight of thought, cannot soar be-yond the limits of the visible world. For this purpose we must become as little children, sitting at the feet of Jesus, denying ourselves, and living by faith on his word. The poor and longing soul has then a place where it may find repose and shelter in the storms of this life, and becomes assured that whatever it loses of the blessings of Christian friendship by the stroke of death, shall be restored to it hereafter in tenfold excellence, to be lost no more.

"And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces" (2 Kings 2:12).

I. Elijah having now shaken the dust of earth from his feet, Elisha, his

faithful companion is left alone in the wilderness beyond Jordan Who can describe the feelings of the forsaken man! Is he really awake? Is it only a vision he sees? No, he is certain of the contrary. He sees the mantle of the ascended prophet floating down from the sky, and his own hands take it up from the ground. It is all reality to the senses.

His friend, his spiritual father soars yonder in the chariot through the air, as really as Noah in his ark was borne upon the waters of the deluge; as really as Moses and the children of Israel passed dryshod through the Red Sea. Rut, O, who had ever seen such a sight as this! In truth, he needed a divinely supporting hand to keep him from sinking beneath the overwhelming feelings which he must have experienced at this solemn moment of his life.

Blessed was he to whom it was given to witness such a scene! But more blessed still is it to see by faith at present those things which are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto

babes. For verily there are those who, though endued with much strength of natural intellect, are, in spiritual things, as men without understanding; who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not.

Elisha must have been now filled with adoring wonder. New hopes and consolations must also have been suggested to him to allay his fears, and console him upon his loss of such a friend. His heart, however, was full, and he cried after the ascending prophet, “My father! my father! The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

Probably the name of father had never before been pronounced on earth with stronger emotion or more affectionate tenderness. It is as if he would still draw back his departing friend from heaven. Elisha knew his worth. He had known him in private as well as in public life. He had found it good to be with him, and to enjoy the benefit of his intimate friendship. For he had shown himself, doubtless, in private life, what God had publicly owned him to be, a true servant of the Lord; and thus had exhibited more than common disinterested love.

Though habituated to so much that was elevated and supernatural, he had shown himself attentive even to the smallest matters which could give real happiness to others around him: and if at one moment he had stood terrible in the scene of conflict, with the drawn sword of the Spirit in his hand, he had been ready the next moment to gather the little ones, the humble and teachable, under the wings of love; to cheer the timid with the most fatherly kindness.

How much then had Elisha lost in this one man! The happiest and most important hours of his life had been spent in his society. O, what recollections would now hover about his soul! What surges of desire, affection, gratitude and regret are poured out in this exclamation, “My father! my father!”

“The, chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!” or “thou wast Israel’s artillery and cavalry;” its glittering legion and its invincible host. What a majestic testimony! Yet what is there in this testimony that is not true of the man whom God had made as an iron bulwark about Zion, and as an armed host against Israel’s foes?

- Think only of the fire from heaven which this prophet, in his zeal for the house of the Lord, called down upon the adversaries of God and of his people;

- Think of the dreadful defeat, which, as with a waving of his hand, he brought upon the destroyers of his people at Mount Carmel;

- Think of the awful thunder which he bore upon his lips for the blasphemers of the Lord;

- Think of the mighty overcoming power which he was wont to exercise against the proudest, the strongest, and most daring of the Lord’s adversaries.

He spake, and the horse and his rider stood as if the thunderstruck. He threatened, and tyrants shrank back, pale and silent, at his rebuke. He commanded in the name of God, and fire and sword united their force to destroy from the earth a whole royal race, both root and branch, because it had taken the fit against the kingdom of the Lord. He was wroth in spirit, and his anger became a blazing flame, which consumed a whole host of lying priests from the land of Israel.

And what a wall of protection was this man about the believers in the land!

- How did he encourage the trembling and scattered flock by word and deed!

- How did he stand for them in the breach, that their faith might not fail!

What encouragement was afforded them, both in precept and pattern, by this champion of the Lord!

And Elijah was not only their champion and standard-bearer, but he was, at the same time, as a Shield round about them in the name of the Lord. More terrible was he to Ahab and to Jezebel, in his invisible armor, than a whole host of Syrians and Philistines. Such was the man who had now departed! This phalanx of Israel and its bulwark was now removed! What would be the consequence? Who would now take the lead in the cause of God, and oppose his breast to the foe? O thou invaluable Elijah! alas, that thou hast left us so soon! “My father! my father! The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!”

It is long since the church of God has seen such men as this language imports; while, on the other hand, the kingdom of darkness is in no want of champions. Yet still, according to the promise, Zechariah 10:3; Zechariah 10:5, we wait for a time when “the Lord of hosts shall visit his flock, the house of Judah, and make them as his goodly horse in the battle; and they shall be as mighty men who tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets.” But until that time, it must be said, “Herein is the patience of the saints.”

In a certain sense, however, the honorable appellation of “the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,” belongs also, even now, to all the faithful and the righteous, and especially to those who, in. the spirit of the New Testament, are mighty in patience and prayer.

Why was the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah so long suspended? Was it not because of the prayer of one righteous man? For, behold, what is testified of him. “I cannot do any thing,” saith the Lord, “till thou be come thither.”

Who was it that interceded for Israel when they fought against Amalek? Was it not Moses, the servant of the Lord? When he held up his hands in prayer, Israel prevailed; but, when he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed. It was not their own sword then that helped Israel; it was not the prayer of Moses, the man of God.

So, in like manner, did Samuel pray; and an inconsiderable band, under Judah’s banner, discomfited their enemies; for, when “the children of Israel were afraid of the Philistines, they said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hands of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.” (1 Samuel 7:7-10). Thus was Samuel Israel’s artillery and armed force.

Behold, my friends, such help and deliverance can praying believers obtain for their fellow men! For faith takes hold of the promise, and takes hold of the divine strength in the promise, and thus can do great things. So, doubtless, at present, the faith of God’s elect restrains many a vial of wrath; and happy is the place where such praying believers reside. They are of greater service to

such a place than walls of brass and ramparts of rock.

Happy the church whose pastors are the “chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!”

- They are Israel’s chariots, when, like Moses once, they ascend with you on the fiery wheels of intercession through clouds and darkness, to the throne of grace.

- They are Israel’s horsemen, when they send their arrows into your hearts, exclaiming, “Thou, thou art the man!”

- They are Israel’s chariots, when, with a holy courage, they thresh every mountain amongst you, and it becomes a plain, that Christ alone may be exalted.

- They are Israel’s horsemen, when, in the armor of God, they take the field in prayer for you, day and night, against the power of Satan and his seducing spirits.

Pray, my friends, for your own sakes, that God may anoint your teachers to be such men, and that you may be able to say of them, when they are gone, “The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!”

II. Elisha’s eyes would still follow his master’s triumphal car;

but it is soon out of sight, and he is now left alone

Well might he now utter the lamentation of the Psalmist, “Woe is me, that I” must still “sojourn in Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar!” He rends his clothes, exclaiming, “My father! my father!”

We are not in a situation fully to understand and sympathize, with Elisha’s grief, because we have never had to mourn over the departure of an Elijah. We must have stood at the grave of a Luther or a Calvin, or at that of a John Arndt, a Franke, or a Bengel, in order to know something of it.

We must imagine what it is to lose a beloved father, or a tender mother, out of a family; and then apply this to the whole church of the saints.

But how different is the end of the ungodly and profane from that on which we have now been meditating, and which, in substance at least, is the earthly end of all the Lord’s saints! The day of grace is, however, yet continued to us.

We still hear the voice of God calling us to repentance, saying, and “Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die? As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live.”

We still behold the open arms of a deliverer, which are kindly extended toward us. But, as everything has its time and its season, therefore “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.”

One of two events must follow our pilgrimage through this world; either an ascent to heaven, or a descent to hell. There is no middle state in eternity. Therefore, “O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sin of world, have mercy upon us. Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, receive our prayer.” Amen.

~ end of chapter 25 ~

02.26. The Legacy

The Legacy CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him” (2 Kings 2:13-15).

We come now to an interesting act-the will of the departed prophet is unsealed, and Elisha is the heir of an inheritance, the like of which the world had seldom seen. Let us contemplate the happy man somewhat more closely in the enjoyment of his heritage, and consider Elisha, I. With Elijah’s mantle;

II. With Elijah’s God;

III. With Elijah’s spirit;

IV. In Elijah’s office.

I. At the moment when Elijah was taken up in his fiery chariot, his prophet’s

mantle, loosed by an invisible hand, fell from his shoulders, and

floated down before Elisha

Although this was a trifling circumstance in itself, yet it is so significant that, we cannot overlook it. With his mantle Elijah had forever thrown off the burden of his commission. When formerly he cast his mantle upon Elisha at Abelmeholah, it was but as a preparatory vocation to the prophetic office.

But Elisha, on inheriting this mantle, is henceforth called to take the place of his great master, and to carry on his work. This singular legacy was therefore very significant to Elisha. The mantle came flying towards him heavily laden. But with the onerous commission he thus received, was connected the encouraging circumstance, that it came accompanied by such a precious memorial of his paternal master. It was now no longer the mantle of the redoubted reformer, but the robe of a blessed heir of heaven, borne thither on the wings of the cherubim. It would remind him, and others, of the kindness and love of God to sinful men, expressed in a most unusual manner.

The ascension of its owner to heaven had rendered it a truly festal garment; and thus it would contribute to refresh the spirit of Elisha in his arduous office; and, at the same time, to identify him as that gracious messenger of peace, who was to announce to the house of Israel, like the rainbow after a storm, the Lord’s goodwill towards men.

It was also a significant circumstance to Elisha, that the official garment he was afterwards to wear was cast to him, as it were, out of the open heavens. What else could he perceive in it, but an immediate investiture and vocation on the part of the living God? And indeed, every priestly man ought to carry the same significance now. I mean, that every clergyman, teacher, missionary, or whoever else labors in God's vineyard, ought to be able to say with Elisha, "I have received my commission from heaven-my call is of God."

But, in the present day, people commonly make the mantle themselves, esteeming it as an idle tale that anything should fall from heaven but rain or snow, and looking upon the sacred office of a minister as upon any other profession, which may be taken up at pleasure, or for the sake of a maintenance. The parents decide for their child that he shall be a clergyman. The vain youthful student, especially if he be conscious of possessing some little talent, immediately thinks himself fit for the sacred office. How many young men proceed to universities to enter upon the study of divinity, without even the most distant thought of asking counsel of God, in order to learn by the directions of Scripture, by circumstances of Providence, and their own qualifications, whether it will be his will to employ them in the work of the ministry; and when arrived at the university, they too often meet with no pious counsellor, such as Elijah was to Elisha, to take them aside, and inquire whether they had any other proof of their call to the ministry than their own notion and fancy, and the counsel of flesh and blood.

Hence it is, that we have now the mournful example of many a flock in Christendom, among whom grievous wolves fill the shepherd's office, to the subversion and ruin of souls. Is it then to be wondered at, that the common mariner should occasionally seize the helm, when the pilot knows not how to govern the ship? The persecutors of such would do well to consider, that they are only opposing what they themselves have contributed to bring into existence.

II. After Elisha had taken up the mantle in God's name, he commences

his return to Jericho, doubtless much affected, and yet comforted;

for not only Elijah's mantle, but Elijah's God remains to him Of this he cannot doubt; but where is the faith which no longer requires a seal?

"Show me a token for good," saith the Psalmist; and what ejaculation of his is oftener repeated than this? Elisha returns to the eastern bank of Jordan. He beholds the stream at his feet, and over it he must pass. Elijah is no longer at his side, and his mantle alone is not sufficient. Elijah's God must manifest himself.

We may easily suppose that he now heartily prayed, if not in David's words, "Show me a token for good;" yet in the language of deep submission and humble dependence on the divine power and faithfulness.

He takes the mantle of Elijah, folds it together as his master had done, and with it he smites the waters of Jordan, saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"

This may sound strange the ears of some: nevertheless it was a right way of proceeding in the present case; and "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27).

The Lord was the portion of Elisha's inheritance; and not the prophet's mantle and commission only; and his faith could say, "Thou shalt maintain my lot." Thus Isaac inherited the portion of his father Abraham; and to Jacob God declared himself as the God of Abraham and of Isaac. To believers also of subsequent times he revealed himself as the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; and thereby promised to them the blessings he had bestowed on those patriarchs; assuring them that he would bear them in his hands with the same, faithfulness. Hence the Old Testament saints, praying, directed their petitions to the Lord God of their fathers.

In the same manner may we regard whatever our "God manifest in the flesh" did for men in the days of his flesh, as a pattern of what he will now do for all who diligently seek him. Thus we may say, "Where is the God of the penitent malefactor? where is the God of Martha, and Mary and Lazarus? where is the God of Paul, and of Peter, and of Mary Magdalene? where is the Lord, who after his resurrection, on the shore of the lake of Galilee, prepared a fire of coals, and bread and of fish likewise, for his disciples, and who had repeatedly fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes?" Yes, "this God is our God for ever and ever: he shall be our guide even unto death." "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and forever!" Lo, he is "with us always, even to the end of the world." Amen.

Surely it is something very great and blessed, that we are permitted to call the God of all the favored individuals mentioned in the New Testament, our God. But the privileges of true Christians may be expressed in yet stronger language than this, because of their mystical union with the only begotten Son of God. They can therefore say, "Where is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

For what is it that Christ himself saith of them in his prayer to his Father? "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved ME" (John 17:21-23).

Oh, incomprehensibly glorious and adorable mystery of godliness! God indeed manifest in our flesh! We are therefore as true believers, who keep his commandments and do those things which are pleasing in his sight, warranted by his own express word, to expect, hope, and desire of God the supply of all our real necessities, as confidently and as assuredly as Christ himself, with respect to his human nature, was thus warranted during his sojourn upon earth.

Think only, with humble and adoring gratitude, what unsearchable riches of blessing are implied in such a privilege as this. And shall it ever cease? No more than the love of the Father to Christ himself can cease. Such is the love to those who believe in his name.

Live! Beloved brethren, daily in the faith of such at as this; and it will enable you to overcome every difficulty in the path of duty; to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.

III. No sooner had Elisha smitten the waters of Jordan, than the

manifestation of the Lord God of Elijah is vouchsafed The stream of the river is again parted by an invisible hand, the course of the upper part of it is arrested by an invisible barrier, and the prophet descends with a firm and sure step upon its dry gravelly bed.

It would be vain for me to attempt to describe to you the feelings which his soul must have experienced on such an occasion as this. A deeply humble and contrite person, experiences some sudden and evident answer to prayer; or a young and modest man of God, who may have been tempted tremblingly to doubt whether he had received a divine call to his office, but who sees in the first loaded fishing net he draws to land, a divine ratification, as it were, of his call to the ministry-such persons will be the first in the present day to sympathize with the unspeakable joy of Elisha, upon beholding the river divided at his word.

In his wonderful passage across its bed he must have experienced feelings something like those of Israel when passing through the Red Sea; and of him also it may be said, that he was baptized in Jordan. Filled with the consciousness of God's nearness to him, he must have felt every doubt and scruple vanish away, like the mists before the morning sun.

He now strikingly experienced that the Lord God of Elijah had caused a double portion of his spirit to rest upon him; God having given him the same power to exercise over the river, was an earnest of what he had granted him besides. How wonderfully also was his office as a prophet to Israel magnified by this miracle!

Upon his arrival on the other side Jordan, "the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him: they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha; and they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

This reverential homage had not so much reference to the man, as to the Spirit that rested upon him, the divine power which showed itself in him. These sons of the prophets not only perceived what was Divine, but they viewed it with affection and veneration. This was a beautiful feature in their character; whereas "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God"

Happy is it also for us, if we are affectionately and reverently affected towards Divine things.

It is recorded of one of the most distinguished painters of former days, that when he was a mere boy, after viewing a painting, by Raphael, for some time, with silent transport, he suddenly broke out, with joy beaming in his countenance, as if he had found a treasure, "I too am a painter!" He then left the picture-gallery, mixed his colors, and afterwards produced works not unlike that which had kindled in him such enthusiasm for his art.

In like manner, it may be regarded as a joyful sign in ourselves when the spiritual image of an Abraham, an Elijah, or a Paul, transports us with affection, and kindles the ardent wish within us, that our hearts were formed like theirs. And it the consoling thought suggests itself, (I am speaking to those who love and keep the words of Christ,) that we also are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, that in us there is something of the same spirit which animated those eminent saints, we ought not to reject such a thought.

For he who knows how to understand and appreciate those in their peculiar character, and is constrained to embrace them with affection on account of their spiritual excellencies, certainly indicates that something of their mind exists within him; for like is only understood and loved by its like.

Hence the Lord says, "He that receiveth a prophet in name of a prophet," that is, in the character of a prophet, or because he is a prophet, "shall receive a prophet's reward;" for by this reception, he

shows himself to be like-minded with him whom he receives.

IV. Elisha, with the spirit of his great predecessor,

inherited also his office and his flock

Elijah had not commenced his prophetical course under such favorable circumstances. He had entered upon a waste moral wilderness; whereas his successor found the fallow ground, as it were, broken up; nay, he even saw here and there a blooming plantation, whose fresh and vigorous shoots already bore the promise of future blessings to Israel.

A minister of the Gospel of Christ ought to esteem it no small advantage to find, on entering upon the care of a church, a little flock of really believing souls already waiting to receive him. However small their number, he discerns among them a little leaven, as it were, which is easily capable of further extension, and an echo to his instructions, his prayers, and his praises, from the hearts of affectionate brethren.

In this consists the prosperity of a church, and not in earthly property and endowments. A church that is rich in the Word of God, is rich indeed. It has then the keys of the invisible world; the weapons against death and hell; the universal remedy for every evil; the wondrous staff that divides every river; the tree of life, whose leaves are for effectual healing; and the lamp which lights the way through time into eternity.

And even should this precious treasure remain like an unemployed capital, and the word be possessed only in outward respects, and not yet have become an inward possession, still a church may be congratulated if it have only the Word. It lies at least within the territory of hope, and is like a field which has received the seed into its furrows, although it has not sprung up. The husbandman regards it with a hopeful eye, for it needs only that the gentle showers fall, and it may by and by appear clothed in the most beautiful verdure. We have to congratulate the inhabitants of our own happy valley, that all its churches are more than such fields.*

* Referring to the valley of Barmen

In many places the Word has sprung up, and we have long had amongst us many living men of God. If we look around us in our church meetings, how many a brother and sister’s face beams upon us there! If we pass through our streets, where is there one in which we might not somewhere or other greet a tabernacle of God with men? Yea, there are quarters of the town in which house after house is a pavilion of the Lord, and where we meet with groups of humble and obedient Christians.

And O, how many a beautiful flower, how many a lily of our valley blooms in modest concealment, known only to the heavenly Husbandman who refreshes it with his dew, or perhaps to one or two among us that has accidentally discovered it! How many a holy soul walks in the midst of us unobserved, and without talking or boasting while few know the rich treasures of grace it bears within it, and the ardent love with which it is attached to its Saviour!

Yes, were all who fear the Lord among us to come together into one place, I believe we should be astonished to see how numerous they are. It is true, they are of various forms and complexions in outward respects; but they are of one spirit, one faith, and one hope. Oh, how we rejoice in being

able to call such husbandry ours! Blessed inheritance, which our never-to-be-forgotten predecessors have left us! The praise, honor and glory belong to Divine grace alone.

But, to return to Elisha, we find him on his way to Jericho laden with the fruits of the Spirit abundantly, to become a blessing to the land; his own mind sparkling like the starry heavens, with a thousand stupendous thoughts and hopes.

Elijah's legacy to his successor may serve to remind us of the better legacy which is bequeathed to every faithful disciple of Christ. The mantle which our Saviour has left to every one of his followers is the robe of his own righteousness, a festal robe indeed! It answers the purpose of armor here, and of priestly glory also, for our entrance into the holiest. It is so interwoven with personal holiness, that the two are always joined together; so that it constitutes the wedding garment of the soul, and sanctifies the members of the body for the service of God.

The God whom we serve is "a just God and a Saviour," who "carries the lambs in his bosom," who deems not the angels too high for our ministering attendants, who combines his own glory and our happiness in one and the same everlasting love.

The Spirit of holiness which be imparts to us, though he does not divide the waves of the sea, yet quells in us the troubled conscience; and though he does not act in us as a spirit of prophetic vision, yet "witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God."

He does not excite us to call down fire from heaven, yet he enables us to cry, "Abba, father!" and though he does not make us workers of miracles, yet he makes us temples of the living God. Yea, and the office of ministers of the Spirit, as all true Christian ministers are, transcends the office of any prophet of the Old Testament in some important respects. For our ministry is that of reconciliation, which cries to men, "Ye are complete in Him;" and that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" and that "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

- We are not only Christ's messengers, but are commissioned to "beseech men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God."

- We are sent even as the Father sent him.

- We act in the name of the Son of God, not only to carry the standard, but the keys of the kingdom of heaven. John 20:23.

Let us rejoice always in these superior blessings of divine grace; and, accounting that "the lines fallen to us in pleasant places, yea, that we have a goodly heritage," let us pray and labor, and labor and pray that we may live accordingly. Amen.

~ end of chapter 26 ~

02.27. Growth In Grace

Growth In Grace CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

We know how much depends upon the hands into which a new-born infant comes, and how greatly its health and vigor in afterlife is influenced by the treatment it receives in its tenderest age. This is true also of new-born babes in a spiritual sense. It is no unimportant consideration to whose superintendence they are entrusted. How many go haltingly all their days through being placed under perverted guidance!

A religious party exists in the midst of us, which, because it does not comprehend the doctrine of sin and atonement in the apostolic sense, has no part in the blessed privilege of serving the Lord in gathering and bringing home the sheep of his fold. No icy heart melts under their teaching; no resurrection of the dry bones takes place under their ministry; yet is that party remarkable for its zeal to extend and increase itself, although it can only do so by building its wood, hay, and stubble on another man's foundation.

The important work of awakening, and of conversion, it leaves to others. It does not begin its labors amongst the dry bones, but only where the stream of new life has already found its way; neither can it exculpate itself, with Paul, from the charge of entering upon other men's labors. 2 Corinthians 10:15. Under its withering influence many a tender plant has pined away, and many a young and hopeful tree has been blasted.

In connection with this subject, we intend, in the course of our present meditation, to notice the character of genuine practical Christianity.

"And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.

"And he said, Ye shall not send.

"And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?" (2 Kings 2:16-18).

I. Elisha now finds himself among the sons of the prophets, doubtless with

his heart deeply affected by what he had witnessed and experienced

beyond Jordan, as well as in crossing it the second time

Endued with a double portion of Elijah's spirit, and destined to do even greater works than his predecessor, his character appears, nevertheless, not to have been immediately comprehended by the mourning sons of the prophets, however sincerely they venerated and loved him, and submitted themselves to him as their new teacher.

They could not, all at once, consider their departed master as fully replaced by Elisha; much less that in the husbandman from Abelmeholah, an Elijah, even of a superior order, was presented to them by the Lord! Nor was this to be wondered at, seeing it was perfectly natural that the dazzling powers of Elijah should affect them more than the less imposing appearance of an unassuming brotherly Elisha.

The abstracted gravity of the Tishbite seems to have corresponded far more with the natural ideas of human greatness than the condescending affability of his humble successor. Elisha appeared rather as an instance of the glory of man through Divine endowment; whereas the appearance of Elisha seemed to commend the greatness of God's grace in human weakness. Hence we wonder not that the sons of the prophets did not at once duly appreciate Elijah's invaluable substitute.

From similar causes the disciples of John the Baptist were slow to perceive that Jesus was greater than his precursor clothed with camel's hair in the wilderness, who seemed to them to carry with him more of the appearance of an ambassador from heaven than the gentle and affable Friend of publicans and sinners. The ministry of the Baptist would, also, at a superficial view, commend itself to those whose minds were not entirely freed from a legal disposition to establish their own righteousness; they would naturally regard it as the most attractive form of piety, and as most suited to their own 'necessities.

The Baptist himself would appear to such persons as a sort of perfect man entirely abstracted from the fashion of this world; and the works of reformation which he enjoined would be numbered up in a tangible sum total. But Jesus, on the contrary, appearing in the greatest simplicity, not withdrawing from the customary forms of life, describing his kingdom as not, coming with observation; and insisting, first of all, on secret submission of the heart; promising, moreover, nothing of human glory to his disciples, and enjoining upon them the despised and neglected virtues of humility and love-was in the eyes of the careless world in general, and of the self-righteous in particular, "without form or comeliness," and there was "No beauty in him" to them, "that they should desire him."

That the hearts of the sons of the prophets were principally with their departed master, is evident enough from the urgent request they made to their new teacher as soon as he had arrived at Jericho. "Behold," said they unto him, perhaps with tears, "there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, of into some valley."

There is something ambiguous in these words. What did these worthy persons mean? Did they not know, by Divine communication, that he was that day to be taken from them? Certainly they knew it; but it is evident that the manner of his removal had not been revealed to them. They might, therefore, suppose either that God had removed Elijah to some solitary place, in order afterwards to take him to himself, or that he was received into Paradise only as it regarded his soul, but that his lifeless corpse might still be lying exposed in the wilderness. Perhaps they thought of the death of Moses, who, in the same region, on the top of Pisgah, was taken away in a mysterious, distinguished and blissful manner, but whose body was secretly buried by the Lord.

But whatever were their thoughts, their intention manifested ardent love which could hardly believe he was really gone. It is also evident, from the urgency of their request, that they regarded the loss

of their master as irreparable, and with all the high esteem they cherished for his successor, were far from believing that he could fill up the enormous breach.

It would have been easy for Elisha, to whom such thoughts and feelings of theirs could not well be unperceived, to have taught them something different. He could have said to them, “I am come to you with messages and information, such as you have never heard from the lips of Elijah. I have facts to relate to you concerning the love of God to man, which have been hitherto unknown to the world at large, and will fill you with adoring wonder.” But Elisha does not appear at this time to have taken a single step towards securing to himself such estimation.

He was above those sensibilities, which, upon the slightest appearance of disregard, are apt to affect us like the sting of a scorpion! Doubtless it was with sincere satisfaction that he witnessed the love and veneration with which the sons of the prophets adhered to their departed father; and was not vain enough to prefer his own honor in their esteem to the wisdom which dictated his silence, for the present, as to what he had witnessed beyond Jordan, and which suggested a more convenient season for his strange and delightful communications.

Though we cannot fully explain why Elisha withheld from the sons of the prophets the account of Elijah’s miraculous ascension, we cannot doubt that he had the wisest and best reasons for so doing. As a prudent steward of God’s mysteries, he appears to have considered the capacities and wants of those whom he had to deal with, and to have reserved such matters for their proper occasion. Hence, though the sons of the prophets were increasingly urgent to obtain his consent to the sending out bf fifty brethren in search of their departed master, all this did not induce him to disclose the secret.

Their urgency was at length so great that he was ashamed at their importunity, that is, he was embarrassed and at a loss what to say to them. But he preferred yielding to their ill-advised purpose, and letting them go, rather than betray his precious secret before the time. It could do them no harm to convince themselves that neither their master nor his mortal remains were to be found any longer upon earth. By this means they would be the more disposed afterwards to credit the intelligence of his corporeal ascension. So they went forth. and searched for three days together through the wilderness country. But their journey proved a fruitless toil, and they returned to Jericho downcast and weary.

The only benefit they obtained by their laborious search, was the gentle but cutting, and we may hope salutary reproof of their master, “Did I not say unto you, Go not!” “Give instruction to a wise man and he will be yet wiser” (Proverbs 9:9).

Sometimes we see it necessary to comply with the foolish wishes of wayward but beloved children that they may learn, perhaps, by painful experience. And this is even exemplified, to our sorrow, in spiritual as well as temporal matters. Thus, how difficult it is to persuade some, that the righteousness which avails in the sight of God is quite near to them-that Jesus Christ is nigh unto them, with all his righteousness to bestow on them, if they only give themselves up entirely to him; and yet will they still forget and undervalue him, and all the while think well of themselves, and thus virtually seek justification before God in their own persons, instead of seeking it heartily in Christ. What then remains for us at last, but to say, “Well, then, go to your own broken cisterns!”

They may thus, for a while, torment themselves with the righteousness of the law, which only worketh wrath; and thus may learn by experience that they have chosen a path of peril, bankruptcy and ruin-where there is no life, no progress, to reward their pains. They may then return to us with a trembling conscience, and welcome the confounding inquiry, “Did we not say unto you, Go not?” and thus Christ r become precious to them, and the Gospel glad dings indeed!

II. Elisha did not consider the sons of the prophets to be yet in a state

of preparation to receive his wonderful communications This reminds us here, to say a few words concerning GROWTH IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians, the third chapter, and the twelfth and following verses, says, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

This is the way in which the true Christian will think of himself: “Not as though I had already attained;” consequently, he will, with the apostle, follow after an increasing conformity to Christ; and he will never forget that this is the object for which he has been apprehended by Christ Jesus.

Let us notice, then, that wherever there is real spiritual life there is progress in that life, from one state of knowledge and improvement to another. “Be ye therefore renewed in the spirit of your minds,” is the language of Scripture; and the fact in real Christians corresponds to it; for they can say, “Though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.”

Think, moreover, how the truth of this statement is confirmed by such a man as the apostle Paul, saying, “Not as though I had already attained.”

Remember that this was the language of one who could also say, “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20); who could also say, “Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:35); who could say, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Php 3:17).

Here then is one who, at the very time that he was, with respect to the church militant, one of the brightest stars in Christ’s right hand, Revelation 1:20, freely and openly confesses that he had not already attained; and even repeats it with greater emphasis again, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.”

It is true, he is not speaking of what he is in point of justification before God, through faith in the righteousness of Christ; for he plainly teaches that the righteousness of Christ, laid hold of by faith, fully justifies us; and hence he could say, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ;” “It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?”

And in another place, “Christ by his one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” But the apostle, in the passages we have been noticing, is desirous continually to see the life of his faith in Christ more and more manifested in the improved state of his heart and life. To appear,

therefore, self-complacent and self-satisfied with our attainments, betrays ignorance of Christ, and want of faith.

But, alas! How many are there among us who appear to suppose that they have “already attained.”

Let us take as an instance, spiritual knowledge. There are many who are well acquainted with the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, and are perhaps able to defend them by argument, and have their minds and memories stored with no small number of texts of Scripture, and pious psalms and hymns; we converse with such persons, and are glad to see them thus furnished.

But a year afterwards we converse with them again, and find them just the same. Two years elapse, and we come into contact with them again, but still no progress can be perceived-till at length the sight of them reminds us of a piece of woodwork, carved in the form of a tree, rather than a living production of nature, for there are no fresh shoots nor any foliage to be seen; on the contrary, the very same modes of speech, the same limited views and sentiments upon every point-no enlarged expansion of the inward horizon, not a single addition to the treasury of Christian knowledge.

“But,” say you, “what need we know more than we do know? Ah, there it is! You have completed the circle of your knowledge; and in this respect, as you suppose, you are already perfect, and have already attained.

But this is an indication of spiritual sickness. For if your souls were in health, and prospering, you would say with Paul, “Not that I have already attained:” you would be sensible of the imperfection of your knowledge.

You would believe that thousands of precious things still lay hidden from you in the Scriptures; you would investigate the holy writings with increasing interest; you would continually find new glories whilst perusing the Testament of your Mediator; and when we see you from time to time, we should hear you exclaim, “O what precious things I have afresh discovered in my Bible! What a new and precious light has been given to me upon this or that subject! What new and delightful views have I obtained of the glory and excellency of my blessed Redeemer!”

And the more you thus grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the more valuable will the Scriptures become to you, and the more sensibly will you be convinced that you might continue to search in this mine all your life, without exhausting it of the half of its treasures; and the more decidedly will you say with Paul, “Not that I have already attained;” but will give so much the more diligence to search further and further into the inexhaustible riches of Christ.

Worse than self-satisfaction in Christian knowledge, is that stagnation of spiritual life which some betray by saying, “My sins were forgiven me; at such and such a time I received the assurance of it; and I know that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance!”

The individual leads henceforth what is called a Christian life, performs his daily devotions, and supposes that everything is done, and that he has reached his aim. But was not Paul fully assured of his forgiveness and election? And yet he says, “Not as though I had already attained.”

We cannot too carefully remember, that wherever spiritual health is enjoyed, the inward life is in continual progress. The child of heaven, the new creature, endeavors after the stature of a man, after “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” There is, then, no end to its improvement. The life of faith in Christ is an increasing abiding in him as its element. Hence there is less narrowness of mind, more love, and humility, more circumspection, more uniform zeal.

One word more upon our “Not having yet attained.” For Paul says, “I count all thing but loss, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

Here, then we perceive that the righteousness of faith ought to be continually the aim and prize to which as believers we are to “reach forth;” I say, continually, and not merely at the commencement of our Christian course. And why are we to reach

Surely in order to enjoy it, to appropriate it, and to be invigorated, by the belief of it, to active love for Christ and for all his brethren; and consequently to walk as He walked, and in perpetually doing good to men, both temporally and spiritually. And this requires perpetual self-denial and exertion on our part. It requires what the apostle calls “reaching forth unto the things which are before.” For surely, we cannot be ignorant, that there are many hindrances to our attainment of this vigorous state of personal Christianity. To name only that single hindrance, our natural reluctance to rely simply on the merits and strength of our Divine Surety: is not this enough to awaken a holy jealousy against ourselves, and a vigilant spirit of prayer and diligence?

We are prone so to forget the freeness of the grace of justification before God, through the merits of the Redeemer, as to fall back in some degree upon the covenant of works. We are apt to imagine that some particular degree of holiness must first be attained, before we can presume to rejoice in the free forgiveness of all our sins, and our reinstatement in the divine favor; whereas, it is entirely through our Lord Jesus Christ that God justifieth the ungodly. Forasmuch, then, as our whole peace, comfort, and strength depend primarily on our heartfelt belief of what we are and have in Christ Jesus, surely we have need of constantly directing our endeavors after a full apprehension and heartfelt experience of the inestimable worth of Christ to our souls. For this is the only way to obtain complete victory over indwelling sin; and it is the main motive to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Faith in the word of God concerning Christ our Saviour, is the healthful element in which a Christian spirit thrives. And how good is it always to remember, that while are endeavoring to apprehend the Word of God, are thus giving a proof that “we are apprehended of Christ Jesus,” as Paul speaks. What a blessing is it always to feel that every desire after him is owing to his own previous love toward us, and to his gracious interposition on our behalf: and that each Christian should speak and think of him for himself, as the Saviour who loved me, and gave himself for me!

Ever then let the wish and prayer of Moses, more and more, be ours: “I beseech thee, show me thy glory!”

Paul being thus apprehended of Christ, follows after, “that he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended” of him. And what is this which he so desires; but that, with every increasing experience that in the Lord Jesus he has all righteousness and strength, he may become more and more like him, by keeping his words, and conforming to his precepts and example; by entering

more feelingly every into the spirit and meaning of all his gracious will and intentions. For his sake this holy apostle had thrown everything overboard which he once had counted gain.

All such things he had learned to account as loss for Christ, regarding them but as dung, “that he might win Christ, and be found in him.” He therefore forgets himself with respect to all that he is by nature and by birth, and all that he had acquired by his own efforts. He has nailed to the cross the image of his whole former man, and cast away his specious advantages as an offscouring from his sight.

He is willing to be nothing in his own eyes-nothing but a poor needy sinner: he is not afraid to behold his own natural condition, for he knows that grace excels and repairs it a thousand times; he is much more afraid of the insinuating fancies of his own virtues and good works, because he is, once for all, resolved never more to admit any other consolation into his heart than that Divine one, that he is justified and complete in Christ. Nay, he goes still further in forgetting self. For even that which he had already enjoyed and acquired, in his intercourse with the Lord, he regards among “the things that are behind.”

Many have been tempted to spiritual pride, or else to spiritual depression, by the thoughts of their past experience in a life of grace.

Some are very apt to indulge in melancholy recollections of a past and better state than that which they now enjoy. They laud the golden days of their espousals, the blessedness they knew when first they tasted that the Lord was gracious; and thus they stand like superannuated old men who have left the fairest periods of their life behind them, and having no definite hopes for the future, only occasionally begin again to warm a little when the past presents itself to their minds, and sends some sunny rays into their present wintry existence.

O how different does Paul appear in this respect! Still brighter attainments of the confidence and joy of faith are the objects he keeps perpetually in view. He presses forward towards the mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. He cannot be satisfied with beholding only a few glimmering rays of the divine glory; or with anything short of being “changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

He saw the fairest days of His spiritual life lying not behind him but before him. Compared with what was yet to come, all the past was to him only as a foretaste; “an earnest of the inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14). And now is not here a pattern for us that may well awaken our desire to grow in grace? What remains, then, but that we be found living and walking in the same spirit and in the same steps, that we may realize the same blessing, the same enjoyments? Put away, brethren, from yourself whatever hinders the free and joyful development of spiritual life within you.

But as this can only be done by the principles we have here endeavored to bring forward-as the love of Christ is the main stem, and faith in Christ is the root of all-keep these principles, beloved brethren, dearer to you than life itself.

May the God of peace and of all grace transplant every one of us from the sterile soil of a false legality and self-righteousness, to the fruitful and well-watered soil of his own Gospel; and under the breathing of his life-giving Spirit cause us to flourish, that we may be perfect in love, and “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ!” Amen.

~ end of chapter 27 ~

02.28. The Writing Which Came to Jehoram from Elijah

The Writing Which Came to Jehoram from Elijah CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

“And there came a writing to him (Jehoram) from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father’s house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day” (2 Chronicles 21:12-15).

I. Elijah rests from his labors At the time of his departure to heaven, king Jehoram, the son of Ahab, sat on the throne of the kingdom of Israel. Jehoshaphat reigned in Judah, and continued to do so until the eighth year after the removal of our prophet. He also had been gathered to his fathers, and his first-born, Ahab’s son-in-law, the degenerate Jehoram, of the same name with his brother-in-law, the king of Israel, had ascended the throne. To this Jehoram, a writing comes, the contents of which were far from agreeable. The writing came from “Elijah the Tishbite,” who had departed in the chariot of fire to heaven at least six years before.

It is said by Paul, that Abel, in a figurative sense, “being dead, yet speaketh.” The quiet and godly character of this pious shepherd; his accepted sacrifice offered unto God in faith; his unnatural death, prefiguring to future ages what the children of God had to expect in this world; his blood, which cried to heaven for recompense; all this is a kind of speaking without the use of words.

And in this way many a pious departed person still speaks, though his tongue may have long been silent in the grave; and many a church and family is thus spoken to by the example of some departed member. What a cloud of such invisible witnesses encompasses us, my brethren; how many never-to-be-forgotten pilgrims of God, whose names still live in our hearts or memories, still preach to us encourage and comfort us by their still remembered words and examples! Thus their influence on earth has not ceased with their earthly life. But here, it would seem; that the prophet Elijah did not speak merely by example to those he left behind-he spoke by a writing.

We are not, however, to expect that many will believe this in the present age, which has for some time been endeavoring to cleanse every corner of the earth from the belief of whatever is miraculous and supernatural. But we cannot conceal our belief that this is one scriptural instance which teaches us, that between the kingdom of the blessed and the dark vale of our pilgrimage, there is not such a vast distance as most persons are apt to imagine.

And are there not several other instances in scripture which support this belief?

- Did not Samuel personally appear after his decease, and speak to Saul in common human language?

- Did not Elijah and Moses, more than a thousand years after their departure, meet their Saviour and his disciples on the mount of transfiguration?

- Did not the apostles, when they beheld their Divine Master walking on the sea, and again when he appeared after his resurrection, imagine they saw an apparition from the invisible world?

- Did not our Lord, instead of reproving them for this, as mere superstition, only appeal to their senses to convince them that he was not such an apparition as they supposed him to be.

Peter, too, after his deliverance from prison, was mistaken by the brethren for his spirit, as they had thought he had died in prison; and is there a word said in Scripture to contradict any such supposed erroneous notion, namely, of the possibility of departed saints reappearing in this visible world?

This awful writing comes to Jehoram six years after Elijah's removal from the earth; and this is all we learn from the sacred text, for no explanation is given.

How, then, is the fact to be explained? There are three different answers given to this question. The first is two-fold: either that the name Elijah is here put for Elisha, because the latter came in the spirit and power of the former; or else that it is put for Elisha by a mistake of the transcribers.

Now, neither part of this twofold answer is by any means satisfactory. The former supposition is unsatisfactory, because it is contrary to the whole analogy and simplicity of Scripture, in plain historical narration, that one man should be called by the name of another. The latter is unsatisfactory, because we have no evidence whatever that any mistake has here been made by the copyists, but all the evidence lies on the other side. For instance, the Septuagint version, which was very early made, and very widely spread, has it Elias; that is, according to its Greek, Elijah, and not Elisha, which latter word in Greek is Eliseus. Again, the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his Antiquities, a work also very widely spread in the world for ages, referring to this event, has expressly the word Elias, or Elijah.

The second answer that has been given to account for this writing coming to Jehoram at time, is, that Elijah wrote it by prophetic presence before he left the earth, and of course, before Jehoram ascended the throne of his father, either deposited it with the sons of the prophets, or committed it to the care of Elisha, and commissioned him to send it to Jehoram at a time scribed. But as we have no evidence of such a fact, so we have no probable assumption for posing it.

The third explanation remains to be considered; namely, that this writing literally came from Elijah the prophet, after his ascension from the earth.

And why not, as well as by the agency of angel, if it thus pleased God to make use of the prophet Elijah? In what manner it was done, we attempt not to explain, any more than we attempt to explain how this prophet appeared unto Peter, and James and John, at our Lord's transfiguration on the holy mount. We venture not to explain how far the powers and sphere of action vouchsafed to the "spirits of just men made perfect" are extended; much less to assert that they bear no relation to the state of the church militant here on earth.

It is in light, therefore, that we receive with simplicity the fact recorded before us; and with this explanation we dismiss the discussion, and proceed to the particulars of the narrative.

II. The awful writing which came to Jehoram contained

unwonted language for a monarch's attention

Doubtless it must have occasioned momentary terror and alarm; but we read of no contrition, much less of true repentance on his part. Alas, to what insensibility and obduracy can a man arrive by pride, infidelity, and frivolity!

Yet surely this warning was sent by a merciful God, in order to alarm and awaken him to true repentance and conversion. Had it produced such an effect, doubtless the awful threatening would have been averted, as in the case of Nineveh; and, as in the case of his own father-in-law, evil had been partially averted by Ahab's partial humiliation. For God is slow to anger, and ready to forgive. He hath no pleasure at all in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Ezekiel 18:23. But, in case he repented not, the sentence announced in this writing was a judicial sentence; and this was awfully the case in the present instance.

Jehoram, when this writing came to him from Elijah the prophet, had nearly filled up the measure of his iniquity; and yet two years elapsed, after the arrival of the divine message to him, before the threat was fully accomplished in cutting him off from the earth. Such is the patience and longsuffering of God!

Let us now review the contents of the writing which came to him from Elijah. It commences with reminding him of his chief sins and provocations.

"Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself."

How terrible this accusation! How abominable the sins here noticed! But be not deceived, as if the Holy Spirit of God can be vexed and grieved only with such sins as these of Jehoram.

God can say to many among ourselves, "I have given you the good word of life and ye have heard it and read it, and yet have gone on in sin and vanity. I have sent you one messenger after another, but ye have not hearkened to them; one affliction after another, but ye heard not the rod, nor Him who appointed it. I reminded you of one commandment after another, but ye have not laid them to heart!"

Elijah addresses Jehoram, "Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father!"

This was to recall to his memory what God had done for his family in times past, and therefore to remind him the more forcibly of his own ingratitude. It was also thus intimated to him that he only sat on the throne because it had been divinely promised to David that his house should continue to the coming of the Messiah; and, further, that he might have learnt, even from David's own history and language, that with the Lord there is abundant forgiveness and plenteous redemption. "Because," continues the awful writing, "thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel."

Here, therefore, is a remembrance of his own pious father and grandfather; and, consequently, an intimation of the so much greater heinousness of his guilt. Asa, his grandfather, had reigned forty-one years at Jerusalem, and had set an excellent example.

“He had done that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, even as his father David had done; for he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves.”

As a true shepherd of his people, he was not less anxious for their spiritual and eternal welfare, than for their temporal prosperity. By his own conduct and ordinances he had called upon Judah to “seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment;” and the Lord had crowned these pious endeavors with the happiest results.

Asa, as a thorough reformer, determined not to rest until the last idol in his land was burnt, and every heathenish altar thrown down. He had called his subjects back from the groves and high places to the altars of the Lord; and the people had obeyed the call, “and entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul.”

As a vigilant and indefatigable ruler, he labored to promote the social welfare of his people, and the external security of his kingdom; and, as a valiant general, he obtained many a triumph over mighty foes, because he trusted in the God of Israel, and marched out with the watchword, “Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power” (2 Chronicles 14:11).

Towards the end of his life, indeed, he on one occasion resorted to the vain hope of man instead of looking supremely to the Lord, 2 Chronicles 16:12; and he had to repent of it bitterly. But he slept in God, and the people consecrated his ashes with tears of gratitude and affection. A still more illustrious king than Asa was Jehoram’s father, the excellent Jehoshaphat. His example shines to this day as worthy the imitation of all rulers. The sacred historian records of him that the Lord was with him because he “walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim, but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments” (1 Chronicles 17:3-4).

He continued and completed the reformation which his father Asa had begun, The well-being of his people, in the highest and holiest sense of the term, was the great object which he kept continually before him. He, more than once, travelled through the land, from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, to strengthen his people in the faith, and to bring back many to the Lord, the God of their fathers; and the Lord gave great success to the labors of this royal missionary.

He sent also priests and Levites about the country with the book of God’s law in their hands, to instruct the ignorant, and to establish the better informed. And we read that “the fear of God was upon all the kingdoms bordering upon Judah, when they heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest round about” (2 Chronicles 20:29-30).

Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents and tribute-silver, and the Arabians brought him flocks, and Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly 2 Chronicles 17:10-12. And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, to watch over right and justice, and to

determine individual disputes.

And he said to the judges, “Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you” (2 Chronicles 19:5-7).

- If he went to war, his first preparation was by fasting and prayer 2 Chronicles 20:3.

- His army, distinguished both for discipline and courage, amounted to one million and eighty thousand strong 2 Chronicles 17:14, &c.

Yet his wars were entirely defensive. He gladly remained at peace whenever the foe left him at leisure, to improve his country and to give fresh impulse to its prosperity by founding new cities, and by promoting education and commerce. Thus did this worthy descendant of David reign. Happy the country which is blest with such a governor! Let us pray that the “powers that be” may ever be disposed to rule like Jehoshaphat. This is one of our plainest Christian duties. (See 1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Such were the honorable ancestors of Jehoram. He had been trained up in the very beams of such excellent examples. Nevertheless he had wilfully yielded to his own natural vanity and pride, and by thus neglecting to hearken to instructors, and listening probably to flatterers, he gradually waxed worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived, till he became such a monster of iniquity, that a worse monarch never sat on the throne of David. It seems as if he had adopted a regular system of openly setting at nought the example of his excellent predecessors, by the disgusting contrast of his own; nay, as if he had made it his chief employment to root up and tread under foot, in the shortest possible time, the seed sown by his pious father.

No sooner had he buried his royal parent, and taken lawful possession of his throne at Jerusalem, that he threw off all disguise, and a horrible massacre opens the black catalogue of his crimes, followed by iniquity after iniquity.

His brothers, who were all of them better than he, seemed to stand in his way, and he appears to have lusted for their wealth, but more especially to have feared the reproach which his heathenish course of life would occasion him in their eyes; hence he hated them, and caused them to be massacred without mercy. Six of them thus died, and one of them only escaped. Many of the great men of the kingdom participated in their dreadful fate, as if the blood of his own brothers did not cry loud enough to heaven.

Jehoram, under the influence of his wife Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, was initiated in all vices and abominations of heathenism. The longsuffering of the Lord omitted not to send him serious warnings. The Edomites invade the country, and the city of Libna revolts from him. But Jehoram perseveres in sin and wickedness, and openly renouncing the God of his fathers, introduces the idolatry of Sidon, which had been expelled by Asa and Jehoshaphat, recalls the banished priests of Baal, erects altars, consecrates groves, invites a people to idolatrous festivals of licentiousness, and even compels Judah thereto with despotic intolerance.

To this the words in this awful writing of Elijah refer: “Thou hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab.” Do not be offended at this mode of expression. The Scripture of Divine truth cannot employ such equivocal expressions

as are used in modern days; its appellations strike always at the root of things; hence; we are not surprised that its searching language and plain dealing should have always offended the hypocrite, the worldling, and the debauchee.

When men depart from the living God and cleave to any idol of their heart, whatever name it may bear, whether that of superior light, philosophy, talent, or liberality, the Scripture calls it whoredom, because it is nothing else, and, indeed, it is the worst and the vilest. The “Maker” of the church is the husband of the church; its innumerable members are collectively his betrothed wife. This mystical union between Christ and his church is insisted on in Scripture throughout; and when any member of the visible church acts not according to it, but idolizes the honors, gains, or pleasures of this world, the Scripture calls his conduct adultery, and pronounces judgment upon it as a thing of Divine abhorrence.

- How awful then is the provocation of those who are not only guilty of this conduct themselves, but by influence or example, in word or in writing, pour the intoxicating wine of their spiritual fornication into the cup of others!

- How awful when parents or tutors do this with respect to those committed to their care!

- How awful when ministers of Christ’s religion teach, under the name of morals and philosophy, “another Gospel which is not another,” corrupting and denying the plain and express Word of God!

- How awful when poets, journalists, and other popular writers endeavor, by every means, to seduce the people from the way of truth into deistical or atheistical sophistry!

Awful indeed are the denunciations of Scripture against all such companions of Balaam! Such murderers of souls! In the divine displeasure against Jehoram, they may behold the same against themselves.

The sins and crimes of Jehoram having been thus reproved, the writing next announces to him the sentence of God.

“Behold, with a great plague the Lord will smite thee. He will punish thy atrocities in thy people, thy children, thy wives, and all that thou hast, and finally, in thine own person. For thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness from day to day!”

O, fearful manifestation of the just judgment of Him who clothes himself with zeal as with a cloak, and repays his enemies to their face. Lo, smoke goeth forth from his nostrils, and consuming fire from his mouth! How fearful a thing thus to fall into the hands of the living God!

Jehoram reads the tremendous announcement; but, instead of repenting, he makes his face harder than a rock, and his neck as an iron sinew. Verily, men become hardened and obdurate through the deceitfulness of sin. Well might he shudder at reading such a writing. But it did not end in humiliation; and whatever will not bend must break.

The divine curse, like a growing storm, soon discharges itself. First, a furious hostile force of Philistines and Arabians suddenly attack the borders of his kingdom. Jehoram sends his armies against them, but they are defeated by the invaders. The blessing of God no longer attends the

armies of Israel. With the faith of their fathers, their fathers' strength in war is departed. The enemy pours into the kingdom like a desolating flood. This was the first plague: the king was punished in his deluded and idolatrously revolted people. But this is only the beginning of his troubles, for his ears are too dull of hearing to discern the voice of the rod and Him that had appointed it. The enemy advances to the capital, and Jehoram's host is vanquished wherever it shows itself. In a few days the conquering army of the heathen are under the walls of Jerusalem. The city is taken, and the remnant of the Jewish army scattered; the king's palace is stormed and taken, his treasure plundered, and all his wives, except Athaliah, who was reserved for a more tragic end, are carried away captive. Even his sons are obliged to leave their native land. One only remains behind, Jehoahaz the youngest; for the Lord remembered his word, "David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel."

All the rest go into miserable captivity. Woeful example of the righteous judgment of God! Here is indeed "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." The destroyer of the people becomes accursed of the people. The avaricious robber sees himself stripped of his family and treasures. The denier of the Lord and his word is denied by him in return, and given up to his own way. The voluptuary and fratricide is visited with the loss of his own wives and children. But his plagues do not end here. Lest his impenitent heart should soon devise a false peace for itself, he is condemned to suffer also in his own person.

The horrible disease in his bowels soon appears, and continues for two years together, baffling all the skill and wisdom of his physicians; so that "it came to pass, after the end of two years, that his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness, and he died. His people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings."

Thus was every word of the divine denunciation fulfilled. Let all who care not for God be admonished by it.

A writing like that prophetic one lies at their very door. It begins, "Woe unto all that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to them that are wise in their own eyes, and pure in their own sight!"

It continues, "The lamp of the wicked shall be put out, and their feet hasten to destruction!"

It concludes, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Neither shall one of these words fall to the ground; nevertheless they do not threaten unconditionally. There is appended to them the words, "Except they repent and be converted, that their sins may be blotted out."

Rejoice at this. You may escape the curse which threatens you. Hear the voice of the Good Shepherd; begin to follow him, and believe in him, and then shall you shall obtain, through him, the forgiveness of all sins.

But "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

~ end of chapter 28 ~

02.29. The Mount of Transfiguration

The Mount of Transfiguration CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

There is perhaps none of the sons of fallen Adam to whom such a superabundance of honor has been granted, as to that man upon whose eventful history we have for some time been dwelling with delight.

After having been received up of God in a singular manner, without passing through the gate of death and the grave, and this at the close of a career of incomparably splendid deeds and wonders, and after having shone for several ages in the firmament of sacred history, new luster is all at once thrown upon his character, some hundred years after his departure from the earth, by his being intermingled with the transporting scene of that great and joyful period, in the anticipation of which Abraham rejoiced, and which many prophets and kings had desired to see, and had not seen it.

But let us now approach the mount of transfiguration, and may the scene prove a blessing to our own souls. It will disclose blissful objects to our view.

“After six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matthew 17:1; Matthew 17:3).

The evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all relate this wonderful event. It was not ideal, but real. The simplicity with which it is related is sufficient to show this. It affords us a glimpse of heavenly things, though very incomprehensible to us.

Let it rather rejoice us than excite impertinent curiosity, that we have here something more than the fiery sign on Carmel, more than the burning bush at Horeb, or the flames and voice on Mount Sinai. “This is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.”

Let us devoutly consider this sublime occurrence, and may the Holy Spirit enable us to learn something of its excellent instruction! We will notice for the present, I. The probable intention of this event II. The event itself.

I. The evangelists refer to the connection of this event with a conversation which almost immediately preceded it, and which occurred at Caesarea Philippi, when the Lord was on the point of commencing his last journey to Jerusalem

“Whom,” said he to his disciples, “do men say that I the Son of man am?” They replied, “Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” Jesus answered, “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter replied, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered, “Blessed, art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood bath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Never had the disciples stood on such an elevation of faith as now. It was therefore a favorable season for introducing them deeper into the mystery of redemption, and for disclosing to them the solemn truth that Christ must suffer, a truth which they had hitherto been unable to bear.

“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”

But the astonished disciples knew not what to think of all this. They could not reconcile their minds to the notion of a suffering; and slain Messiah. Hence Simon Peter fell back for a moment from his exalted faith to the mere notions of a natural man; and, quite forgetting the humble relation wherein he stood to the Lord, he takes him with unbecoming haste aside, and says to him in a tone of advice, or rather of reproof, “Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” But the Lord, immediately perceiving from whence his expression, “Spare thyself,” originated, replied with holy severity, “Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

The manifestation, therefore, in the holy mount, appears to have been vouchsafed, partly on account of the disciples, in order afterwards to cast a ray of light upon the gloom of Golgotha, by showing their Master’s resignation to his sufferings; and further to show them who he really was whom they were soon to behold crowned with thorns and nailed to the cross.

They might here also learn that he would not fall a sacrifice to unfortunate accidents, and that he could not fulfill the mission upon which he came, unless he voluntarily gave himself up to death.

They might here also learn that the voluntary death of Christ was in harmony with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; the voice which they heard coming out of the cloud.

Put it beyond a doubt. Moreover, the transfiguration served to annihilate the suspicion that there was anything in the establishment of Christ’s kingdom at variance with Moses and the prophets, for the appearance of the heavenly envoys, and their converse with the Saviour, testified most unequivocally to the contrary.

Behold then what a fullness of divine light and information was contained in this one fact. It served to strengthen the faith| the disciples to such a degree, that they might refresh themselves by the recollection of it during the rest of their lives, as we find Peter does (2 Peter 1:16-18).

But let us not suppose that this manifestation was intended solely for the disciples. Not only earth, but heaven itself participated in it. It was a spectacle also to angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. Edifying and joyous must it have been even to them to behold the glory of their abased King thus breaking forth as the light. From this glory there proceeded new occasion for heavenly praise.

Nor can we suppose that the transfiguration did not take place partly on account of the Son of man himself. Indeed its most important intention appears to have had reference to him, and him alone. For though, even in the days of his flesh, the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him; yet he, with equal truth and reality, led a human life likewise.

As man, he had to believe, conflict, and learn obedience, even as his own disciples. His way, like ours, lay through manifold temptations, spiritual desertion, and darkness; nay, seasons were not wanting to him, when like his people he really needed strengthening, comfort, and encouragement; neither did be despise even the sympathy of his disciples. Matthew 26:38.

God had prepared him for his temptation in the wilderness, partly by the testimony he gave from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;” and as He was now approaching a still more portentous and awful conflict, the glory on the holy mount would serve to prepare him for it. Recollect the scene in John 12. Jesus had come to Jerusalem. The fire, which was to consume him as a sacrifice, was about to be kindled.

The night was at hand; its approaching horrors were foreseen by him. His sacred humanity trembles, and the cry breaks out, “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour.”

He submits to the will of the Father; and now he desires something else; “Father, glorify thy name.” “Glorify thyself in me, and show that thou art my leather, and that I am thine Only Begotten.”

He speaks, and immediately a voice is heard by the people about him, who thought it thundered. “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again!” Vow the words, “I have glorified it,” might partly have reference to the event in the holy mount.

Thus, the transfiguration might have been intended as a means of invigorating the Son of man himself, in the prospect of his approaching hour of trial. For, sin only excepted, our good Shepherd was willing to pass through all the states and conditions of his sheep, and to labor like them, in faith and dependence on his Father, from one day to another. “He wakeneth” mine ear, saith he in Isaiah 50, “Morning by morning; he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God has opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.”

II. The consideration of the transfiguration itself will

afford us further important instruction

“After six days,” relates the evangelist, “he took Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up to a high mountain apart.” These three disciples he repeatedly distinguished above the rest: he afterwards took them with him Gethsemane, as into the holy of holies, to behold there the priestly altar and sacrificial fire; but here it was to view his regal splendor and glory. It seems almost as if the Saviour in this respect felt and acted as a man; that he showed that special affection which the heart of one friend feels for another, and was nobly sensible of that lovely bond of tenderness which we call mutual sympathy; like that of Jacob, whose life was bound up in Benjamin’s life.

It is true, that his children were all equally dear to him; he loved them all, even as the Father loved him. But there were two or three who seem to have stood nearer to his natural human feelings; and the nearest of these was evidently the apostle John, who is emphatically called in Scripture, “The disciple whom Jesus loved;” and, the next to him were his brother James and Simon Peter. And how amiable does Simon Peter appear even in his well-meant mistakes, on account of his ardent zeal for his Master, and his frank and ingenuous disposition!

And who would not have be constrained to love James-the holy and warm-hearted man, who was ready to be, and actually was, the first amongst the twelve to drink the cup of martyrdom! And then John, that noble young branch in the heavenly Vine, that eagle spirit, who was named, with his brother just mentioned, a son of thunder, whose character nevertheless so beautifully resembled that of Jesus himself-a character full of tenderness and heavenly love, which seemed touched as with the live coal of the sanctuary; where has there ever existed, next to the “fairest of the children of men,” a more lovely character than this disciple? The innermost chords of his soul harmonized with those of the human soul of Jesus.

Yet was our Lord’s predilection for these three disciples no more than a subordinate reason for taking them with him to the holy mount. He had other reasons incomparably more important, which are to be sought for in the particular vocation of these three, and in their peculiar relation to the person of Jesus. For they undoubtedly appear as the Lord’s more intimate circle, even as they were afterwards selected to be the three principal pillars of the church. They were to be the first who should plant in the midst of storm and conflict the banner of the cross on the mountains of Israel; and, on this account, they peculiarly required such a signal preparation as they were now to receive.

The sacred narrative informs us that Jesus took these disciples with him to “a high mountain.”

From ancient times it had been the Lord’s custom to select the retired summits of hills, those quiet islands amidst the ocean of worldly confusion, for the places of some of his most remarkable revelations. The mount on which the transfiguration took place is not definitely pointed out to us in Scripture.

According to an ancient and not improbable tradition, it was Tabor, the most considerable and beautiful mountain in Galilee.

This eminence, which a modern traveler found entirely covered with green oaks, and other trees, shrubs, and odoriferous plants, stands elevated in the wide plain of Jezreel, at no great distance from Nazareth and Cana; and it is said of it, that if there is anything beautiful in nature, it is this green and rounded mountain pyramid of Palestine.

Its summit is three thousand paces in circumference, and presents one of the most extensive and charming prospects to be found in the world. To the right, the eye, after contemplating Mount Carmel, that ancient scene of the Lord’s glory, looks over the vast expanse of the Mediterranean Sea. Northwards appears the glittering snowy cupola of Hermon, with the black ridge of Lebanon beneath it. Towards the south, the eye first rests upon the beautiful verdure of luxuriant vineyards and orange groves, and further on, upon the mountains of Samaria; whilst to the left gleams the sea of Tiberias, intersecting the waving cornfields of the plain of Esdraelon. But why do we cast our looks into the distance, when something nearer at hand, of a more transporting nature, calls for our attention?

The apostles subsequently called the mount of transfiguration, “the holy mount.” Yes, those are holy places, and must ever be so esteemed by us, where we once could say with Jacob, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

There are our Bethels and Peniels, where he whispered to our souls, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love!” or where he wiped away our tears, and crowned our supplications with his Amen. Such places are consecrated in our esteem. They are lovely spots in this vale of tears; and he that has many of them is truly rich!

Jesus commences the journey to the mount, followed by his three disciple’s. As the ascent required about a day, we may suppose the sun to have already set, and the evening twilight to have commenced by the time they arrived at the summit. Solemn silence reigns all around. The disciples, weary with the journey, and at the same time mentally exercised by the conversation on the way, and by their solemn situation with the Saviour alone, in the silence of night, on the solitary mount, recline themselves upon the ground and sink into slumber.

The Saviour prays to his eternal Father.

What was the particular subject of his prayer the history does not inform us; but it might be similar to that in John 12:1-50, “Father, glorify thy name!” or in John 17:1-26, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee!” How sublime! How affecting! The Prince of Life on his knees before the face of the Almighty! The Son of the living God engaged in holy converse with the Eternal Father on the dark mountain height! Surely, if ever the words “stand at a distance” were appropriate, it was here. And what ensues when Immanuel prays? His prayer must attain its object. It is high as heaven in its ascent from the heart of the Son of man.

And yet he is ever willing to mingle your supplications with his own intercession, and thus to give them full effect. You know how he said to his disciples, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.”

Jesus prays, and what is the result? All at once it seems to the sleepers as if a bright light were playing about their eyelids, and as if the sound of a conversation penetrated down into the depths of their slumber. They stir-they awake; and well might they conjecture, in their sudden surprise, that the night was past, that the sun was in the highest blaze of noon.

They look about them with amazement. But, O! What an incomparable spectacle! Behold him! behold him! Is that shining one yonder indeed their Master? Is the majestic figure which appears arrayed in Divine glory, he! Whose company they ascended the mountain? The disciples are overcome with the sight. But it is no alarm or terror that they feel. This is not a Sinai, so as to cause them to say, “I exceedingly fear and quake.” The glory here breathes only peace and joy. The heart is enlarged by it-the soul would gladly be entirely absorbed in it. Let our souls then sink likewise into the contemplation of this glory. Let our spirits rejoice in its wondrous light, and receive health and salvation. “This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.” O contemplate the King in his beauty!

“And Jesus was transfigured before them;” more literally, “He transfigured himself.” The expression implies, that the glory was not shed upon the Lord externally, but, as existing in him from the beginning, it only broke forth outwardly in the manifestation. Even then, whilst he still lay in the manger, as an infant, poor, and requiring assistance and whilst laboring as the carpenter’s son, the whole fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily, though concealed and veiled behind the curtain of a servant’s form. Single rays of this hidden glory had occasionally emanated from

him in deeds of omnipotent mercy, so that all who saw it were astonished, and said, “What manner of man is this? From whence is he?”

But such an expansion of the rose of Sharon as this on the mount, had none yet witnessed. Such a discovery of his hidden glory and majesty had hitherto not been made. But however unspeakable and beyond all earthly splendor this glory was, it was not the whole fullness of his beauty as the Son of God.

In comparison with that glory in which he will eventually meet us above, it was probably only as the early dawn compared with the perfect day. For he manifested his beauty, only as far as mortals could apprehend and bear it. But since the whole scene on this sacred mount was only a specimen of the glory which Jesus had in himself, therefore John, partly perhaps in allusion to this very event, speaks of the Word made flesh, tabernacling among us, as the Shekinah, “full of grace and truth.” The glory in which he there appeared to them was nothing borrowed, but his own most peculiar and real form; it was the visible reflection of the corporeal indwelling fullness of God, and consequently a manifestation full of truth.

But for what reason John calls this manifestation of the Son of God, a revelation “full of grace,” he himself must tell us, in order that we may completely comprehend it. The glory here manifested was a benign glory, a transporting reflection of pure kindness and love. Streams of peace flowed into the disciples’ hearts; sweet and sabbatic repose breathed around them, and every ray that fell from his countenance upon them, affected their souls as a new expression of the love of God.

No wonder that Peter exclaimed, “Lord, it is good for us to be here!” They would gladly have remained, forever remained, in this beatifying irradiation of Christ.

We leave the summit of the holy mount, in order soon to return thither with our meditation.

Keep firm hold in spirit of the glory which has there beamed upon you. It will be to your faith and your love that which the vernal sun is to the first buds of nature.

And what a blissful light does this scene reflect upon those great words of Jesus, “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.”

What a meaning does it supply to that other promise, “The righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!”

O let us now by faith build here a tabernacle for our souls! Let the summit of holy mount be our oratory and our watchtower!

02.30. The Holy Embassy

The Holy Embassy

CHAPTER THIRTY

“And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” (Matthew 17:3-4).

Thus we stand again upon the holy mount around a solemn silence-before us the King in his beauty. We gladly yield up our minds to the contemplation of his glory, when, lo! a new appearance attracts our notice. There are three subjects which at present claim our attention:

I. The heavenly embassy;

II. Their converse with the Saviour;

III. Simon Peter’s request.

I. The disciples stand in adoring astonishment, and in a kind of

beatified contemplation of their glorified Master

But, all at once, new amazement overtakes them, for they behold two other personages beside the Lord Jesus; and who are they? The Saviour converses with these venerable strangers.

The disciples listen and find the one to be Moses, the other Elijah, possibly from hearing Jesus call them by their names. But how must this information have increased their astonishment!

They must have felt almost as if the earth had retreated from beneath their feet, and as if eternity had overtaken them unawares; for now they are certain that they behold, face to face, two happy citizens of the invisible world. One of them was now fifteen hundred years old, and yet fair and flourishing as a green palm tree in eternal youth. It is Moses himself that here stands before us, he that was king in Jeshurun, the man who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense of the reward.

And as for the other, it is Elijah! Who, nearly a thousand years before ascended to heaven in the fiery chariot on the other side Jordan. Behold, he suddenly appears again in bodily form, in the country of his ancient conflicts; but, O, in what a different condition! How full of praise and raptured adoration within; how encircled with glory without! If he now called to mind the scenes of his former sufferings, how must they have appeared as the dreams of a night long fled!

Moses and Elias! How wonderful! For centuries they had been admitted into the more immediate presence of God; for centuries had the sabbatic peace of the upper world been their element. Through their hearts whole streams of bliss had already flowed, of which only scanty drops bedew this earth. What might not those messengers from heaven have told us! What new information

might they have given us, respecting the invisible world.

But they are silent; probably for the same reason which obliged Paul also to withhold from us the description of “the third heaven,” into which was caught up, 2 Corinthians 12:2, &c. The Strangely broken expressions which the apostle uses, when speaking upon this subject, show how much his heart was moved by the recollection of it. He seems struggling to express something, which he counts amongst the highest and holiest things that had ever been disclosed to him. He knows it was no dream, no play of imagination, but a real translation into paradise.

Where was he then, for he was away from the earth? Was it only in some blissful planet or star, from whence, like Moses upon Mount Nebo, he could “behold the land that is very far off?” (Isaiah 33:17) No; he had been in the very heart of that land: he had been in “the third heaven.” But as he gives us no description of that blissful place, so it may safely be said that his silence, implying his inability to describe what he had witnessed and experienced, is for us at present the best description of the glory of the third heaven.

Every attempt at description would entirely fail, both on account of the poverty of earthly language, and on account of the weakness of human capacity, and our want of powers of conception for such things. Indeed, to attempt to describe them, it would be necessary to dip the pencil in something that is terrestrial, however beautiful; and this would be to dip it only in gloomy shades.

Another circumstance, which may serve also to give us some idea of the glory which he saw in the realms above, is the ardent desire with which we afterwards behold him longing after those mansions of light. His conversation is henceforth in heaven. His hopes, his desires, his thoughts reside there, and the morning and evening song of his heart is, “I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ.”

Death seems to him the most blessed messenger that could arrive; yes, death even in its most dreadful form; for he knows that when absent from the body he is present with the Lord. How joyfully does he now receive the cup of afflictions; “For I reckon,” he exultingly exclaims, “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

- “To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

- “I count not my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.”

Thus, my brethren, has the apostle, who heard “unspeakable words,” animated us with expectations of paradise, which, the more strongly excite our longings after home, the less they are capable of being uttered in human language.

It is in this indirect manner also that the two heavenly persons on Tabor afford us cheering information being themselves a living epistle of the things of the world to come. How sweetly does their very appearance address itself to that faith which still trembles, weak and uncertain, over the tomb. What a satisfying evidence is it of our personal and perceptible identity in another state of existence!

And then the glory in which they now appear who were once so tempest-tossed; what a blessed testimony does this bear to us of complete “victory” over death, “through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1

Corinthians 15:57) It is indeed true, that we have a greater witness of the other world than Moses and Elias. But as God has granted us these subordinate witnesses, let us thankfully receive them as the apostles of Christ.

Since the gate of Paradise was closed, heaven had scarcely ever visited earth in such a manner as here on the holy mount. What an assembly! The Son of eternal love clothed in majesty: before him the two dignified ambassadors from the city of God; beside them, Peter, James, and John, the pillars of the New Testament church; about them, doubtless, the holy angelic hosts; and within hearing; the voice of the Eternal Father, whom no eye hath seen nor can see.

Where on earth was ever such a gathering together as this? There had hitherto been wanting, even in the Paradise of these triumphant saints, the delight of saluting the King of all kings as a Brother and a Kinsman. Oh, to behold him now, whose day they had so long looked for! Him, by virtue of whose sufferings they had worn the crown so long beforehand! Him, the Lamb of God, whose sacrificial blood, so long before it was offered up, had blotted out their sins!

Surely a new heaven would disclose itself, even to them, in such a contemplation of their Messiah!

II. Here also is a striking representation of the and unity between

the economy of the Old Testament and that of the New

Moses appears as the representative of the law; Elias, as the representative of the prophets. As such they humbly and adoringly draw near to Jesus.

The Law and the Prophets give witness to the Son of Mary. Such is the important meaning which we behold in this scene.

- “Judah, indeed thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.”

- “Thou art he,” exclaims the Law, “unto whom I as a schoolmaster would bring every man.”

- “Thou art he,” say the Prophets, “who wast the burden of our inspired song.” And when both Moses and Elias disappear in the radiance of the “fairest of the children of men,” that great truth stands embodied before us, that “Christ is the end of the law, as well as of prophecy.” Prophecy finds in him its fulfillment, for he is the substance of all the shadows.

The Law ceases from all its judgments, threatenings, and condemnations, as soon as it finds the sinner in Christ.

Moses and Elias, we read, conversed with the Lord. Attend a little! What kind of discourse was it which they carried on with him? Did they announce to him that a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, stood ready to carry him away from the gloomy scene of earthly conflict to his Father’s house? No; the conversation is concerning a cross and a crown of thorns; an altar and its consuming flame.

“They spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31).

As envoys from the Eternal Majesty they audibly confirmed that it was the will of the Father, that of his own precious blood he should make atonement for sin; “for without the shedding of blood there was no remission.”

They impressed, in God's name, a new seal upon the ancient and eternal truth, that the partition wall which sinners had raised, could be broken down by no other means than by the power of his sufferings; that He, as the good Shepherd, could only ransom his sheep with the price of his own life. Such was the substance of the conversation on the holy mount.

We might almost imagine these blessed messengers trembling for the first time during a thousand years, at having to converse on such things with the Son of God. But they call his sufferings and death a decease; or exit, as if to comfort him with this expression; and they speak of the ACCOMPLISHMENT of this decease, or exit, as if they would present to his mind the prospect of his succeeding glory and joy.

III. The sublime interview between the Lord and

the heavenly embassy is concluded The glorified messengers are about to take their departure. But the three disciples, and especially Peter, naturally wished to have it otherwise; and, giving to his feelings, he exclaimed, for himself and his brethren, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

Peter has been severely censured, in various ways, by some writers, for this exclamation. Of such censures we shall take no notice, for we regard him as free from all such imputations. His request appears to have proceeded, confused as he was, from right and holy motives. Was it not really good to be there? Did not the most spiritual joy flow there? And was not the King in his beauty there?

The unveiled face of Immanuel was there; in beholding which, even the inhabitants of heaven find their supreme delight. Their Lord's unspeakable condescension to sinners had never been displayed to them so clearly before. The glory of the Son of man had never been seen by them as now; neither had the love of the Father been so experienced as now. They felt themselves abundantly satisfied in the contemplation of all this.

They could have forgotten this earth altogether for the sake of it.

They wished to lengthen this incomparable moment, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee!"

"Lord, it is good to be here." For where indeed is heaven? Is it not to be with Christ? Where he reveals himself fully to the soul. So then, our knowledge of him here "in part," is indeed a part of heaven. What a lonely place in itself was this solitary mountain! But as soon as the disciples saw his glory, when he "was transfigured before them," they might well say, "It is good for us to be here."

There are some who are concerned to inquire what sort of an abode heaven is. But what need is there of such inquiries if we only can be present with the Lord? How much more needful, then, is it for us to inquire, whether He is ours, and we are his? He is verily our real heaven, and his nearness to us is our highest bliss.

How comfortable are words, "It is good to be here!" Whereas, under the old dispensation, it was said, "How dreadful is this place!" Genesis 28:17; and "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." Judges 13:22

“It is good to be here,” said Peter. How seldom is this expression heard among thousands, who, nevertheless, profess to belong to the New Testament church! Alas! but few know the true element of peace and joy, and fewer still endeavor to breathe perpetually in it.

“Lord, if thou wilt,” continues Peter, (which is the language, not of forwardness, but of submission,) “let us make here three tabernacles;” for whom? “one for thee, and one for Moses, one for Elias.”

He would have had then two these citizens of heaven to delay at least their return to Paradise. This was a hard thing to ask. Yet he seems to have taken it for granted that Moses and Elias would willingly tarry forever where Jesus was. It seems expressive of humility that the disciples do not think of building four only six, but of three; as much as to say, “We are willing to stand at a distance and listen;” for the question, Who should sit at Christ’s right hand, and who should sit at his left, in his kingdom? is not thought upon here. When we have a clear sight of the glory of Christ, our own pride lies in the dust. But perhaps their thought was to abide in the tabernacle intended for Jesus, for they would venture to enter there rather than into the others.

And how truly do the hearts of God’s children respond to this! A faithful man of God, well known to many of my hearers, said, in his last moments, the thought of having to pass, in the other world, through all the radiant ranks of angels and glorified saints, almost made him afraid; but upon recollecting that he should immediately behold his Saviour, his heart was at ease again, and he could depart with joy.

No tabernacles, however, were actually built upon the mount. The thick cloud soon hid Moses and Elias from their sight, and Jesus was left alone. The corn of wheat was first to fall into the ground and die, before it could bring forth fruit, John 12:24. They were to remember the vision for their own comfort, but to tell it to no man till after the Son of man should be risen from the dead.

Spiritually speaking, the tabernacle for whose delightful shelter Peter thus longed, could only be erected above the cross. The sacred pavilion, however, is now really erected in this vale of tears-a wondrous, glorious, and incomparable temple. Its pillars embrace a world. Its upper story reaches to the stars. Its walls are invincible as omnipotence. Though heaven and earth be shaken, yet its foundations shall stand and remain unmoved. The natural eye cannot see this temple. This wondrous building is visible only to the eye of faith. The light falls into this temple from above. There, no longer groping in the dark, we walk in the light of the seven-branched candlestick. It is no longer inquired in this temple, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?”

- Here we know of an offering that justifies the ungodly. There is no longer any room for the saying of Cain, “My iniquity is greater than that I can bear”, or, that it may be forgiven.”

- Here it is said, “Where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded.”

- Here there is no longer any occasion for the exclamation, “Let not God speak with us, lest we die!”

- Here we learn exultingly to cry, “Abba, Father!” and to cast our cares, like children, on the Eternal God who careth for us.

- The robe, with which everyone here is clothed, is a robe of righteousness.

- The bread that is here broken to us, is the bread of that peace which passeth all understanding.

- The cup of blessing, of which we here partake, is a portion which no one taketh from us.

- The air which is breathed here, is the air of Paradise.

- The censer of prayer and intercession, kindled here, ascends as a sweet savor to the Lord.

- The songs which resound here, have for their burden, “I have obtained mercy!”

- The Preacher’s instructions this temple are, “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.”

If there be a happy abode under the sun, it is within this spiritual tabernacle. Happy are they that are in such a case, however poorly they may live as it respects the body! They need not envy kings upon their thrones, or the renowned of earth under their pavilions of honor. Verily, they are the happy ones who thus abide under the shadow of the Almighty, who are hidden in this pavilion, and in the secret of this dwelling-place, founded on the Rock of ages!

In other words, thou they may have to pass through great troubles, and to encounter great adversities in this life, they know whither their way conducts them. Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; there remaineth a rest for the people of God.

Who introduces us into this mansion of peace? One only who bears the key of David; He on whose worth the house is founded as on an eternal rock. He still stands at the gate ready to open it. O, supplicate his mercy! Rise not up from his feet until he has opened the door of his kingdom unto thee, and until thou also canst rejoice in him, as “He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and that shutteth, and no man openeth.” Amen.

~ end of chapter 30 ~

02.31. The Shekinah

The Shekinah CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: [and they feared as they entered into the cloud, Luke 9:34;] and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5).

A new phenomenon now occurs on the holy mount. We have reached, the most interesting part of this portion of sacred history. Let us collect our thoughts, in order calmly and adoringly to consider,
I. The bright cloud;

II. The testimony which proceeded from it.

I. This bright cloud had an important and sublime signification

It was the Shekinah, or divine habitation, the sign of the Lord’s peculiar presence, like that vouchsafed in the early days of the Old Testament. In the time of Moses, a cloud, resembling a pillar rising towards heaven, formed the habitation in which the Lord God went before his people Israel in the wilderness. He also invested in a cloud the manifestation of himself on Mount Sinai. At the dedication of Solomon’s Temple “a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; the glory of the Lord had filled the house. Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.”

But a cloud somewhat different from that on Sinai, and in the Temple, was here. No stormy tempest accompanies it. It carries no rolling thunders, as on Sinai; no lightnings flash from it; nor is it accompanied with thick darkness, but glittering as if the sun shone behind it, and bordered with light as with the dayspring from on high. Thus this cloud appears as announcing the beginning of a new covenant period.

Moses and Elias enter with Jesus into the cloud as into a presence-chamber, or as into a Father’s house. How far from that ancient leader of Israel now is the expression, “I exceedingly fear and quake!” with which he once approached the darkness wherein God dwelt! Nor does Elias now cover his face as he did upon Horeb.

Both of them have become strong to bear the nearness of the Eternal. They are so in Him who accompanies them, and who took them under the shadow of his wings.

II. “And behold, a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” This voice came from no far distant height, but from the bright cloud which now overshadowed Jesus, Moses and Elias. It is the voice of Him “who sitteth upon the throne between the cherubim, who clotheth himself with light as with a garment.” It is the voice of the everlasting Father. He, from whom are all things, clothes his almighty voice in human language, and audibly testifies concerning the Son of man.

O the blessed realities of the holy mount! Surely they are an anticipation of the fulfillment of the great prophetic voice out of heaven, “The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3).

This testimony on the holy mount is rich in meaning. First, it comprehends, in a very few words, the sum of the Old Testament, which, in Christ Jesus, is Yea and Amen. “This is my Son!” is from the book of Psalms. “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” The addition, “In whom I am well pleased,” is out of the prophets, namely, in Isaiah 42:1. The words, “Hear ye him,” you will find in the writings of Moses. “A prophet like unto me, shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me. Unto him shall ye hearken.”

There is, moreover, in these words, a reference to the three offices of our Lord.

- “This is my Son,” shows us Christ as a King.

- “In whom I am well pleased,” points him out as the Mediator and High Priest, in whom God reconciles the world unto himself.

- “Hear ye him,” represents him to us as that Prophet to whose instructions we must listen.

Finally, this testimony throws light upon the relative character which the Redeemer bears.

- The voice, “This is my Son,” tells us who he is, with respect to his divine nature and incarnation.

- The relation he bears to us is also implied in the words, “In whom I am well pleased.”

- In the injunction, “Hear ye him.” So full of meaning are these Divine words; indeed, who is able to express all the fullness of meaning which is contained in them!

We already know the intention of this great testimony of God the Father. It doubtless addressed itself, first, to the five witnesses of Christ’s transfiguration, before whom, as the representatives of the visible and invisible Church, Christ is here solemnly proclaimed the priestly Head of the new kingdom, and his dominion over all things, and especially over the church, purchased with his own blood, was here formally ratified to him by the Father. We may, however, well believe that the testimony of the Father is also intended, like that at Jordan, for the Saviour himself, and was to afford support to his faith, in the prospect of his approaching sufferings.

And cannot we perceive, that after each of these his Father’s public acknowledgments, a new power appears in him, a new grace manifests itself in his discourses, a new ardor in his words and actions, and a more exalted state of mind for conflict and victory? Yes; in his human nature he grew like his people, and went from strength to strength.

“This is my beloved Son.” The Father calls him his beloved Son, in a sense and meaning which can belong to no other being on earth or in heaven. This appellation bespeaks him to be no mere creature; it avouches heaven to be his throne, and earth his footstool. It evinces him to be the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.

It presents him to us as the Word that was with God, and was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing is made that was made; though now made flesh, and dwelling or

tabernacling among us, as the true Shekinah, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Oh, how happy are we, to find our faith thus founded on God in Christ, and sustained by the immediate testimony and glory of God the Father. Everything depends upon the certainty of this article of our faith, “God manifest in the flesh.” The whole edifice of Christianity rests upon this one prime truth.

You know, Paul calls this mystery “incontrovertibly great,” and certainly it is so, in whatever way we consider it. It is great, in its amazing contents-God in man! Great by its mighty achievements-having cast down a thousand infernal strongholds and refuges of lies, by which the deceiver of the whole world holds men in the bondage of sin, fear, and temptation. Great by its unexampled operation-it plants a new creation in the old.

Great by the continuation of divine power-it daily delivers fresh victims from the depths of Satan. Great on account of the glorious promises connected with it-for all the nations which God hath made shall come and worship him through this mystery, and shall glorify his name.

Indeed, what may we not perceive by the light of this single truth, “God manifest in the flesh?”

- We may see heaven open, and behold the eternal mansions of poor sinners prepared for them.

- We may see this earth, once the seat of the curse, hereby transformed into a residence of the glory of God, a scene of the greatest wonders of his love.

- We may see the fallen sons of Adam renewed unto holiness.

- We may hereby see the fountain of Divine mercy opened to us, of whose depths we formerly had no conception;

- We may perceive a Divine and human Saviour upon the throne of power, who is not ashamed to call us brethren; with the holy angels for ministering spirits to him and to us.

Well, therefore, the apostle calls the mystery of “God manifest the flesh,” “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Certainly the whole temple of our happiness rests upon this one truth.

The Father calls the Lord Jesus, “his beloved Son.” But who can fathom the depth of this expression, “My beloved?” In all human or angelic love there is no parallel to this. Didst thou even know how human glorified spirits love, yea, how angels love one another, still this love of the Father would be found infinitely to excel it all. Who, from a mere drop of water, can learn the extent and depth of the ocean? Who, from the dim light of a candle, can conceive of the blaze of noon, and the extent of the solar rays? Yet those are but comparisons of things finite with finite. And yet this beloved Son, O sinner, God spared not for thee: he SO loved the world, that he gave him for thee, that, believing in him, thou shouldst not perish, but have everlasting life!

Who shall comprehend the full import contained in that SO? Eternity alone can disclose it.

And yet, who is it to whom the voice of the Father thus bears testimony? Is it not to him, who, as the second Adam, represents ourselves, as our covenant Head and Surety? Surely this testimony

of the Father's complacential love is borne likewise in favor of all who belong to Christ; that is, of all who abide in him, and keep his commandments. Therefore, they may well refresh and strengthen themselves with the same Divine love and kindness.

To the declaration, "This is my beloved Son," is added the testimony, "in whom I am well pleased." The Father beholds his own glorious perfections in him, and besides this, he beholds in him the Mediator for us, and with this he is well pleased also. Jesus said, "For their sakes I sanctify myself;" and the Father is perfectly complacent in his so doing. Here, then, we see our own interest in the testimony given in the holy mount. Are we the devoted followers, the obedient disciples of Jesus? Then the Father who is well pleased in him, is well pleased in us for his sake; is well pleased with us in him.

"Hear ye him!" is the conclusion of the voice from the cloud. Christ is the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life. Had he not come as the teacher of this ignorant and benighted world, what should we ever have known that is worth the knowing? We should have been like poor forsaken orphans, and should have been ever at a loss to know what we are, where we are, and what is to become of us. We should have been forlorn wanderers indeed, in the valley of the shadow of death. No prophet would then have carried a torch before us. No apostle could have showed us the path of life. Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and all the rest, shone not by their own light, but by the light of the Sun of righteousness.

They were but as moons, some of them only in the first quarter, others more advanced, and some were as full moons, possessing bright, undiminished splendor. The same remark applies all our teachers under the New Testament disposition. The great office of them all is to bear witness to Christ, the Sun of righteousness.

"Hear ye him!" This needful admonition suggests a mournful reflection upon our present moral condition. Think only, that to a race of beings who, spiritually considered, know not as it were their right hand from their left, a Saviour is sent, who is as much at home beyond the stars as on this side of them, and whose ministry, as proceeding forth from God, is sealed with proofs sufficient to astonish heaven and earth.

This Saviour comes, saying to the world, "I will remove all darkness and doubts from before you; I will explain to you the mystery of your existence; I will teach you the true nature of God and of man; I will unfold to you the remotest ages that are past, and the most distant of those that are to come; I will show you the way of peace, and point out to you the open gate of a new Paradise."

Might we not reasonably expect that the whole world would immediately gather around him, and that all the race of Adam would sit, like Mary, at his feet; or be like Samuel, who said, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth?" But how very different is the fact! There has been, alas, no lack of teachable disciples at the feet of erroneous teachers, false prophets and vain babblers; but in the church of the great Dayspring from on high there has always been room to spare, even to the present hour. Not as though there were any want of authentication of his doctrine. No: the sole reason of it is the corruption of the human heart; the deep depravation of human nature.

Not as though the Gospel did not exactly befit our human necessities; for nothing can be more suitable to them than the remedies it brings: but this is the cause-that the sinner neither knows nor cares to know his own most urgent necessities. Nor is it that the Gospel is unintelligible; for it is, in

all its most essential matters of faith, within the comprehension of a child. But it opposes the vain delights and desires of our fleshly mind, which loves darkness rather than light, that it may not meet with any check to its own willfulness. Neither does the Saviour impose any heavy yoke upon man! Oh no; “his yoke is easy, and his burden light.” But the degenerate creature, in its rebellion and pride, will not hear of any yoke at all, and will obey nothing but the dictates of its own fleshly will.

“Hear ye him!” How important a testimony is this to the whole of the New Testament revelation! Let us then learn to read and listen to every word of Christ, as if the testimony of the Father, “Hear ye him,” were still sounding in our ears.

When the Saviour saith, “Without me ye can do nothing;” and testifies, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me,” when he promises eternal life to those who believe on his name, and threatens the unbelieving with the wrath of God, and with a fire prepared for the devil and his angels, forget not the voice of Majesty, which said, “Hear ye him.” He then who refuses to hear the Son of God, refuses to hear the Father. Not to hear him and receive his words, what is it but to make God a liar? But “He that hath received the testimony of Jesus, hath set to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33).

But what kind of a hearing is it which the Father here enjoins? It is the hearing of our implicit and cordial faith. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

This passage of Scripture is like the pillar of cloud and of fire between the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. It secures the salvation of believers, and the condemnation of unbelievers.

Let us only further notice how the apostles of Christ refer to this testimony of the Father as one of the most powerful arguments for the truth of their doctrine.

“We have not followed,” says Peter, “cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Let this testimony then remain ever present to our faith. If you are looking for a polestar amidst the confusion of the present unbelieving age, it beams upon you from this testimony. The voice from the holy mount will serve to dispel all the doubts of your mind.

“There are,” says an enlightened writer, “two sorts of persons that deserve the name of men of understanding. Those who serve God with their whole heart, because they know him; and those who, though they know him not, seek him with their whole heart.”

He adds, “There are in world, spiritually considered, three sorts of persons.

- The first have found God, and serve him.

- The second have not yet found him, but seek him.

- The third live without either serving or seeking him.

The first sort are wise and happy; the last sort are unhappy, wicked, and foolish; the second sort are wise, but not yet happy,”

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Amen.

~ end of chapter 31 ~

02.32. None But Jesus

None But Jesus CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

It is much to be lamented that the Saviour is so little known to many, who yet are not utter strangers to him. Our acquaintance with him increases with the consciousness of our necessities; and the more we become acquainted with him, the more will the divine nature be expanded within us.

Man is from his birth a degenerate being, blind and naked, alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in him, and a willing servant of sin. He neither knows Christ, nor feels his need of him. He cries “Peace! peace!” to himself and to others, when “there is no peace.” Erroneous ideas of God and of himself lull him into carnal security; but there are seasons when he has many misgivings, and when God appears to him in the light of a jealous God, a consuming fire. By the grace of God, many in this disquieted state begin to inquire in earnest after peace. They hear or they read of Christ. They find some consolation in the news of a Saviour, but not of the true and right kind.

They betake themselves to many means of amending their lives; but, alas! instead of trusting wholly in Christ, they lean on their own performances. “They make vows and good resolutions, and soon break them as easily as they were made. Thus they discover their own insufficiency and helplessness, and this teaches them to found all their hopes on Christ. By and by, however, they learn again that their faith, though real, is still very weak, by reason of their still looking partly to themselves.

Some assault or trial of their faith serves to convince them of this. Temptation of some kind has proved too effectual; and now they begin to perceive that all their strength is in him; that they must maintain perpetual communion with him; that they must abide in him, or else they will bear no fruit, but wither. At last they learn to depend entirely on him, and thus their strength is confirmed, and their path becomes as the shining light. Thus do our necessities, from time to time, serve to promote our spiritual advancement; and thus the knowledge of Christ is found to keep pace with the sense of our own wants. It is great gain to suffer the loss of all things, that we may learn depend on Jesus alone.

“And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only” (Matthew 17:6-8).

We are now arrived at the closing portion of this remarkable part of sacred history. The particular history of Elijah here loses itself in that of our blessed Lord. It now remains for us to consider, I. The awful impression which the voice from the Shekinah made upon the three disciples;

II. The relief which Jesus gave to their minds;

III. Their subsequent experience.

I. The solemnity and sublimity of the transfiguration scene reached

its height at the moment when the bright cloud overshadowed our

Lord, with Moses and Elias, and when the voice of the Father’s

testimony proceeded from it.

Up to that moment the disciples had felt indescribably happy on the holy mount. But no sooner is their Lord and Master, under whose wing they had hitherto felt secure, enveloped in the cloud, and the voice from the excellent glory sounded from it, than their comfort is instantly at an end, and their rapture is changed into fear.

They fall on their faces as if thunderstruck, and are sore afraid. So awful is the approach of Eternal Majesty to the sinner. “Let not God speak with us!” cried Israel at the foot of Sinai, “lest we die. For who is there of all flesh that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?”

“When I saw his face,” says Daniel, “and heard the voice of his words, there remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I sank on my face to the ground.”

When Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, he expressed his amazement by saying, “Woe is me, for I am undone! for I am a man of unclean lips.”

And even the disciples, whom Jesus loved, at beholding the unveiled glory of the King of kings, fell at his feet as dead, and the arm of Omnipotence was needed to lift him up, otherwise he would have sunk under it. What is the reason of this terror in man, as soon as he perceives the nearness of God? Does it not betray alienation? By nature we are disposed practically to deny him. Our natural terror, therefore, at the thought of his presence, is but too evidently founded on our consciousness of being guilty in his sight.

We think we are something; but when God’s excellent greatness becomes suddenly discovered to us, we sink before it. Besides, our present sphere of vision and conception is very limited. All our thoughts are earthly, and all our conceptions of spiritual things are derived from this world of sense; so that, when we behold such things in their real nature, it threatens, us it were, to break down the whole fabric of our ideas and notions.

Hence it is no wonder that extraordinary manifestations of the invisible things of God should overpower us with amazement and terror.

But how could the disciples be so terrified, seeing they knew the Father, by having believed on him, and possessed in Christ their Head, such a fulness of glory, that they could easily bear the loss of their own?

We answer, that if self had been utterly annihilated in them in the presence of Eternal Majesty, they would have risen up only the more gloriously in Jesus; but as this was not the case, so, in more senses than one, Jesus was to them behind the cloud. Their insight into his mediation did not yet reach so far as to enable them comfortably to hear such a manifestation of God as this.

The full import of the words, “Who is he that condemneth?” had not yet entered their hearts. But how shall they, who have not yet learned the wondrous art of beholding and finding themselves in Christ alone, stand without terror in the immediate presence of the divine Majesty.

A word from his mouth, to the mightiest amongst us who is not thus prepared, is as the voice of the Lord which breaketh the cedars, and maketh Lebanon and Carmel tremble. Were he only now to exclaim from the skies in the hearing of the whole world, “I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last!” what a vast change would it instantaneously occasion in human theories and opinions!

How different would be the view which men would immediately take of their present state of existence, and how different also the manner of life of many millions! A host of blasphemers would be, as it were, bound with the terrors of the Almighty. Well, this will one day come to pass. “Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so. Amen.”

But at present, it is in the way of faith that Goa chooseth to be found of them that seek him. He will not thus forcibly manifest himself, till he shall come to the last judgment.

It was not only the voice from the clouds, and the unexpected approach of Divine Majesty, which so terrified the disciples upon the mount; but even in the testimony itself there was something awful, though it did not exactly tell them anything new. For though they had themselves confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God, and had just seen his divine glory on the mount, still this confirmation of his sonship, as coming to them immediately from the excellent glory, might add to their belief in God incarnate, such vivid clearness of sensible demonstration as to overwhelm them with amazement and awe.

All this is perfectly natural; and if the Lord were now suddenly to remove from our minds the shade with which our spiritual light is so greatly intermingled, and to elevate our faith to that clearness of demonstration which would amount almost to sight, the consequence would be, that even the truths which we already believe and embrace would overpower us beyond measure, for instance, the truth, that the babe once laid in the manger at Bethlehem is God incarnate, and the truth, that the Son of God was ignominiously nailed to the cross for our sakes. For we at present behold all such truths in an attempered light; we see them only as in a glass darkly, or, as it were, through a veil with which God moderates the overpowering effect they would otherwise have upon our present weak frame and faculties.

Such things are far too wonderful, supernatural, and excellent for us to behold, except as through a veil; without which, in our present state, they would fail of producing the effect which God designs by them.

II. The three disciples fell to the ground as dead and could not venture to lift

up their eyes, as long as they felt the immediate presence of the Eternal But their Master again approached them, and at his approach “every valley shall be exalted.”

He, like a wise masterbuilder among fragments and ruins, or like a skillful artificer, who forms vessels of honor from clay trodden underfoot.

“And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.”

There was doubtless new vigor imparted by it, besides its natural adaptation to human feelings. The Sun of righteousness hath healing in his wings.

Remember the poor woman, mentioned in Matthew 9:1-38, and the believing language of her heart; “If I may but touch his garment I shall be whole.” Her confidence, you know, was not put to shame. A touch of Christ is the only means of our spiritual restoration. This must be obtained by faith in him, and fervent prayer in his name.

This touch is, in other words, the work of his Holy Spirit upon our hearts and minds, producing inward peace and personal holiness, love, humility, meekness, self-denial, and activity to arise and labor for the glory of God and the good of man.

III. No sooner had Jesus touched the terrified disciples, and spoken

to them these encouraging words, “Arise, and be not afraid,” than

they are immediately delivered out of all their fears, and peace

again takes possession of their hearts

“And when they had lifted up their eyes,” relates the evangelist, “they saw no man, save Jesus only.”

Moses and Elias have returned in the bright cloud, to their heavenly abode, to relate to their companions in glory the things they had seen and heard on the holy mount. The holy angels resume their ministrations before the throne, and their praises are increased. The divine luster which, beaming forth from the Lord of glory, enlightened the darkness of the night, has withdrawn itself behind the veil of his servant’s form; and it becomes again upon the mount, as it had been before, dark, solitary, and silent.

The wind plays in the rustling foliage; the stars twinkle silently in the firmament; but in the hearts of this little assembly it is different. The divine Redeemer, after his conversation with the heavenly messengers, anticipates more cheerfully the bloody baptism which awaits him.

The glorified spirits approach with an increased measure of holy boldness to the throne of Glory and Majesty; and the three disciples-oh, how did they now rejoice more than ever in their Lord and Master.

However brief are generally the moments which we may be permitted to spend in the mount, beholding the King in his beauty; they are moments which we justly reckon among the best and happiest of our lives. Though they may only momentarily enlighten our darkness, they are not lost upon us; a blessing remains from them which attends us in our path; a secret ministration of strength which is not soon exhausted; a light that lives in the storm, and helps to cheer the gloom of much temporal and spiritual conflict.

“And when the disciples had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”

This circumstance serves to remind us of that state of mind, which, in the more immediate sense of the word, may be called gracious and evangelical. Oh, how desirable is it to have our distracting thoughts so banished and subdued as to see “Jesus only.”

Without this we cannot be vigorous, practical Christians. Learn, then, to look away from yourself entirely, and to “stand fast in the Lord.” Divest thyself of all anxious care about the future, for that is safe in his hands.

Yea, having committed “the keeping of thy soul to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator,” thou hast no occasion to tremble even at death itself.

Think of those words, “I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” Oh the blessedness of that peaceful position of mind in which everything that is seen by us is seen in Christ; seeing nothing in the winds or waves, or in ourselves, but only in Jesus.

The disciples seeing no longer Moses or Elias, but Jesus only, may serve further to suggest to us instruction with respect to viewing Jesus as the true Lawgiver, and the true Restorer of all things. Oh, happy is it, when the sinner at length perceives that he has his sufficiency in Christ alone, and needs no other support. He then walks at liberty, keeping Christ’s commandments with his whole heart. The peace of God which passeth understanding, now keeps his heart and mind by Christ Jesus. The terrors of the law no longer appall him, and yet he now learns to keep the law universally, and more steadfastly than ever.

“Jesus alone!” Yes, when the day shall have arrived that the “Lord shall be king over all the earth; and there shall be one Lord, and his name one” (Zechariah 14:9); then that which we have considered as spiritually significative on the holy mount, will be substantially realized. The whole world will then behold Jesus alone, as “fairer than the children of men,” and will have his name written in their foreheads.

All will bear his image; and everything will be dedicated to his praise. The very forms and creations of art shall glorify him; the halls of learning will be beautified with the wisdom which is from above; and the Lord alone will be the center and focus of all the sciences.

The Lord alone will be exalted in that day; his love will form the sacred and inviolable bond of nations.

Oh! How should we earnestly pray for the dawning of that happy day: “Hallowed be name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

We thus close, for the present, our meditations on the history of Elijah; hoping to resume the one day more effectually in the city of our God.

Let us be thankful for every word of consolation and edification which we have derived from these meditations; for to divine grace alone is all such benefit to be ascribed. It was that the precious name of Jesus might be glorified in our souls that we began and have continued these discourses.

May the Almighty graciously so dispose us all, that it may be said of us, in a blessed and spiritual sense, “When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only!” Amen

~ end of book ~

Chapter 48

03.00.1. ELISHA: A PROPHET FOR OUR TIMES

ELISHA: A PROPHET FOR OUR TIMES. BY F. W. KRUMMACHER, D. D. Of Elberfeld, in Prussia TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN

———

LONDON THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

Instituted 1799

COPYRIGHT 1838

03.00.2. Preface

Translator’s Notes The following work contains the first part of Elisha’s history, which is all that has yet been published by the Author. This translation has undergone the same careful revision as that of Elijah the Tishbite; and, like that work, it has been no further abridged, than by the omission of some passages which were considered to impair its value, and by condensing others which were too diffuse; but, occasionally, a few Scripture quotations have been added. In doing this, the object has been to free the work, as much as possible, from the disadvantages usually incident to a translation, and to issue it in a way most likely to benefit the English reader. Of the necessity of such revision, those only can be fully aware who are acquainted with the original; and the great acceptance which Elijah the Tishbite has met with, sufficiently shows the suitableness of this plan to Christian readers in general. The Editor takes this opportunity of stating, that the only works bearing the name of Krummacher which he has revised and edited are, Elijah the Tishbite, and A Glimpse of the Kingdom of Grace, published by The Religious Tract Society.

R.F. Walker

1838

03.01. Elisha's Appearance: 2Ki_2:19-22

Chapter 1 Elisha’s Appearance

2 Kings 2:19-22 The inspired prophet Micah, foretelling a blessed period yet to come, which is styled "the last days," says of it, in Micah 4:4, that then men "shall sit, every one under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid." What a touching representation of peaceful privacy and delightful repose is given by this single sentence of prophecy! The period, indeed, which it describes, was very "far off" to the prophet himself; and even at our Lord’s incarnation it had only begun to dawn; for the New Testament still speaks of it as "the last days." Nevertheless, from the earliest ages of the Old Testament, there were blessed periods of shorter and longer tranquility, in which the delightful preludes of that eagerly desired "last time," were conspicuously displayed. The patriarchal age immediately after the flood, strikes us as a prophetic type of the great gospel year of jubilee. Childlike simplicity and confidence characterized the intercourse which prevailed between the Almighty and the saints of that period: the thunders of Sinai were not yet heard, and the terrors of the law had not yet begun to constrain the children of the promise. But they were constrained by love, arising from the kindness and condescension of Him, who now graciously rejoiced again in the habitable parts of His earth, and whose delights were with the sons of men, Proverbs 8:31. In the tents of an Abraham, and in the grove of Mamre, a spirit reigned, similar to that at Emmaus, where the two disciples sat familiarly at table with the Man who was God in the highest; or like that which was manifested at Bethany with Lazarus and his much favored sisters. A similar period, transcendently peaceful and benign, smiled upon Israel, when Elisha appeared. To that happy, enlightened period, we propose to direct our present meditations. May the Spirit of the Lord, the only Interpreter of the sacred oracles, graciously be with us, direct our observations, and instruct us to find much profit and delight in what has thus been written aforetime for that purpose!

"And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the land barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake."

Here then we are again returned to those times and scenes of wonders, wherein so many sources of consolation and encouragement were recently opened to us, in the achievements of Elijah the Tishbite, and in the occurrences of his eventful life. The very country is not unknown to us. We seem acquainted and at home in it; and the eye scarcely alights upon a district, a mountain, a valley, or a hamlet, that is not associated in our minds with some important and beneficial recollection of our previous spiritual excursions. On this stage a new history will now unfold to us a variety of most important incidents; the history of Elisha, the man of God. May this glorious narrative accomplish the design of Him, who caused its insertion in his word, and become to us

who believe, a spring of manifold refreshment, a well of deep and lasting consolation in seasons of distress! Our considerations will be, at present, but preparatory; and will concern, I. The character of Elisha’s mission; and, II. His first prophetic appearance.

03.02. The Character of Elisha's Mission

The Character of Elisha’s Mission

Elisha entered upon his course, immediately after his great predecessor had been taken up into heaven. Let us briefly recollect the state of public affairs in Israel. King Ahab, by the judgment of God, had been slain in battle at Ramoth Gilead, and Ahaziah, his son and successor, was no more among the living. Because he had sent to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, as if there had been no God in Israel, the prophet Elijah had been sent to him with the alarming communication, "Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." And his unrepenting death had terminated a life spent in forgetfulness of God. From the brow of this Ahaziah, the crown, stained with a thousand crimes, had now passed to Jehoram his brother, the second son of Ahab and Jezebel, and it is in his reign that Elisha begins his prophetic labors. Of Jehoram, with whom we become acquainted in the course of Elisha’s history, the Scriptures relate, that "he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord;" but not quite to the same extent as his father and profligate mother had done. Alarmed by the Divine judgments which he had seen inflicted upon Ahab and Ahaziah, he had thought proper to remove the image of Baal, which his father had set up and worshipped; but he still adhered to the golden calves in Bethel and in Dan; he fully restored and supported the order of Jeroboam’s idolatrous priests; and though he sometimes did homage to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, it was only in acts of momentary and hypocritical constraint. His mother, the widowed queen Jezebel, continued, with his connivance, her vile and infatuated practices, and used all her influence with the unstable monarch to confirm him in his iniquities, and to increase the moral depravity of the people to a frightful degree. A disgusting idolatry, mingled with every kind of vice, continued to be the religion of the state. The whole realm was filled with this darkness from the bottomless pit; and the little church of God, though it glistened above the midnight covering with sublimity and brightness, was but as a green spot in the desert, or as a solitary isle in the stormy ocean. And now, like a rainbow on the dark cloud of those troublous times, appears the beneficent and evangelical mission of Elisha. Many regard it only as a faint sequel to the career of the Tishbite, but a little deeper insight into the matter will lead to a very different conclusion. Was Elijah an original phenomenon? Elisha was equally such. Who would think, because he had seen a rose, that the apple blossom has no beauty of its own? The appointment of Elisha was no repetition of Elijah. It was essentially different from that of his illustrious predecessor; and the entire organization of the man, no less than the manner of his appearance and acting, exactly harmonized with those special duties which devolved upon him. The former prophet casts no shade upon the latter; but each in his proper station serves beautifully to set off the other.

We anticipated in our reflections upon Elijah’s history, something of this peculiar difference of the calling of Elisha. We anticipated it in the still small voice upon the mount of Horeb, as indicative of that milder season of providential dealings with Israel, which the son of Shaphat was to usher in. Elisha was a kind of evangelist and forerunner of Him, whose feet are beautiful upon the mountains; whereas Elijah, like another Moses, had to restore and vindicate the dignity of the law,

which was then neglected and despised. Elisha was to conduct back to Jehovah any who had been aroused from their deathlike slumber by the awful ministry of Elijah. For this benign office he had been unconsciously trained by the providence of God. The earlier circumstances of his life, as well as the disposition of his mind, had tended to prepare him for it. Habituated to a peaceful, but active, rural life, he appears to have grown up under the combined influence of cheering natural scenery, and simple family piety. When his affectionate parents expressed, as they evidently did, the sanguine and pious joy of their hearts, by giving the name Elisha to their new-born son, they probably little expected how significantly appropriate that name would one day become. For its meaning is, "God is salvation," or, "God is my Savior;" and the son of Shaphat was designated to announce him, in this character, to Israel. Whereas the office of Elijah, as his name imports, was rather to demonstrate to the thoughtless multitude, the awfully judicial power and majesty of Jehovah: that of Elisha, on the contrary, was neither alarming, imposing, nor overwhelming; it inspired confidence, and rendered approach easy; it indicated a messenger less awful than the man of God upon Mount Carmel. The Lord, who dwelleth in the high and holy place, now humbled himself to behold with special condescension the poor and the wretched. And this great and precious truth, Elisha, by his preaching and his acts, was to make manifest to Israel. How gracious is the King of kings, who thus early disclosed to sinners the freeness of his mercy and his love! Never did he forget the poor of the flock.

03.03. His First Prophetic Appearance

His First Prophetic Appearance The first act of Elisha’s public life, sets forth at once the character of his mission. It was at Jericho, that very city upon which Joshua had pronounced a Divine curse, that Elisha’s mission commenced with the removal of a curse. Thither he repaired immediately after his illustrious predecessor had been taken up into heaven, and there he intended to await the first commands of Jehovah. In a few days he was called forth to action. The inhabitants of Jericho, aware that they had still a prophet among them, were soon eager to avail themselves of the advantage. Oh that the light of every Christian brother beamed with the mild radiance of an Elisha! And this it would do, if we were only contented to appear as vessels of mercy, representative of the meek and lowly Savior. Still, however, there are some, whose light is thus beneficially shining before men. They are dead unto themselves, but Christ liveth in them. Their "life is hid with Christ in God;" they live above the world. There is something unspeakably soothing and animating in the company of such humble Christians. Their faith has taken firm hold of the world to come, and their heartfelt peace sheds a blessed influence around them. The oppressed, the doubting, and the afflicted, have recourse to them, and obtain alleviation and succour; for they follow the steps of Him who invited the weary and heavy laden to come to him that he might give them rest. In their words and actions his own love seems to smile upon us; and we seldom leave them without obtaining clearer views, and more exalted hopes.

What the inhabitants of Jericho wished to lay before the man of God was this. The situation of the city had been once remarkable for its beauty. The soil, favorable to vegetation, had rivaled in fruitfulness the most productive parts of the Holy Land. But it no longer retained its ancient beauty and fertility; for the devastating effects of the curse, pronounced upon it by Joshua, were strikingly visible. The palms drooped dejected; the gardens no longer yielded their perfumes; the cattle languished upon the pastures once so luxuriant; the flocks cast their young in the fold; and the people themselves were afflicted with disease and early death. All these calamities had their origin in the water, which had been rendered pernicious by the curse. The complicated miseries which accrued from these causes, made it almost a matter of regret that Hiel, the Bethelite, had rebuilt the city. What could the inhabitants of Jericho more earnestly desire, than the deliverance of their district, in every other respect so well situated, from this distressing and mortifying remembrance of the past. Doubtless many attempts had been made, and much treasure and art uselessly expended to accomplish it: yet the evil was not removed. But as Elisha was now resident among them, the thought occurred, that he might possibly befriend them. They were sensible that the chastisement which God had inflicted on them, God alone could remove. They therefore applied to the man of God. They found him among the sons of the prophets, and, having been encouraged by the kindness of his manner, they modestly intimated to him their desire: "Behold, we pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the land barren." Would to God, that this description, given by the men of Jericho, were not, in another sense, so applicable to many places in our own country, equally beautiful and delightful, except that the water is bad:—I mean the spiritual water; and, therefore, the moral field is barren and unfruitful.

Wherever the spiritual fountains are corrupted, and, from the pulpit and the professor's chair, instead of the pure truth of the gospel, multitudes imbibe the poison of modern infidelity, which, however tinctured with Christianity, yet, by causing a forgetfulness of Bethlehem and Golgotha, stimulating proud man to seek salvation in himself, spreads desolation and death in every direction; there a more destructive curse prevails, than that which rested on the fields of Jericho. The pastures may be clothed with flocks, and the gardens pour forth their sweets; but the moral field is uncultivated and waste. There, science may furnish its splendid but perishable garniture, and men may adorn themselves with its specious covering; but hope, peace, and joy are banished from the mind, and spiritual death reigns triumphant. Oh that the God of Elisha may heal waters like these around us! The grace of Christ crucified is the only healing virtue here; and where this is experienced, the wilderness is transformed into "a fruitful field," and the desert is made to "rejoice and blossom as the rose." No sooner had the men of Jericho declared to the prophet their desire, than he showed the most cheerful readiness to comply with it. Perceiving that the thing was from the Lord, and instructed by his Spirit how to act, he replied, "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein:" and the men flew with joy and expectation to execute his commands. Elisha, in the performance of this miracle, was directed to the use of means; though the means he made use of were in themselves of no efficiency whatever. But the very unsuitableness of the remedy necessarily contributed to make the reality of the miracle more apparent. Thus Moses was Divinely directed to lift up his rod over the Red Sea; and thus, in after times, the laying on of hands was enjoined to the apostles. Moses' rod, without which Moses himself was powerless, was intended both to remind him, and to impress upon the witnesses of his miracles, that he was only an instrument in the hands of God, and immediately dependent on his power. The same end was to be answered by the means which the Lord prescribed to his servant Elisha. Had Elisha healed the waters by a wave of the hand, or by the simple expression of "Be it so," it might have seemed as though the power rested in himself; and the miracle would have failed of its object. But by the method here adopted, it appeared in a different light; and the power of God, in giving efficacy to means so insignificant, was abundantly manifested. Nor was it without design, that the inhabitants of Jericho were directed themselves to produce the salt and the cruse. It gave prominence to the main purport of Elisha's mission, which was designed to show forth the glory of the Almighty, as a God of mercy and salvation, making use of common instruments—mere household vessels—to effect his great and gracious purposes. All this was strikingly evangelical.

Elisha, receiving the cruse, went forth to the spring of the waters, attended by the men of the city, and, without any preliminary parade, or pompous solemnity, cast its contents into the spring, exclaiming, "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land." Observe, how scrupulously Elisha guarded the interests of his Master! How studiously he ascribed all the glory to Him, to whom alone it belonged! How careful was he to prevent the smallest portion of such honor from attaching to himself, or to the means employed! The Lord alone was to be glorified; and, therefore, the miracle was to appear as the pure act of his own goodness and mercy.

"Thus saith the Lord." With these words did the prophet approach the spring; and with the power that authorized them, it was not difficult to perform miracles. Such a power could even have called new worlds into existence. The work of God is perfect, and superior to all difficulties. "He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." We, indeed, are not gifted with the word of

healing as Elisha was; but if we are God’s faithful people, we possess words of even greater and more blessed import. We can say, "Thus saith the Lord, None shall pluck my sheep out of my hand." And we are certain that these words will confound the powers of darkness. We can say, "Thus saith the Lord, Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am!" and are warranted to believe, without a doubt, that, would mountains and seas impede our course thither, even seas shall be dried up, and mountains be cast down before us. We can say, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold the fowls of the air! O ye of little faith, are ye not much better than they?" We can say, "Thus saith the Lord, All things shall work together for good, to those who love God!" With Divine assurances like these, we are encompassed as with a wall; and they will prove no less efficacious than the words of Elisha, "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters." The words were uttered, and at once the change was accomplished. From that hour, the water became all that could be wished for refreshment and health, and imparted both wherever it flowed. The fields recovered their ancient fertility, and man and beast could rejoice in renovated life and vigor. All traces of former desolation disappeared; the inhabitants of Jericho were filled with joy; and a cheerful, stirring activity became everywhere visible, in young and old. The happy shouts of the reaper resounded anew between the vine-clad hills; while the shepherd, with his lambs sporting around him, answered from the plain with the melody of his solitary pipe. The native husbandman contemplated with unmingled joy the rich promise of the coming harvest, and the traveller could commend, and celebrates to this day, the exhilarating freshness of the waters of Jericho.

How gloriously was the Almighty revealed in this miracle! What a striking instance was it of his power and goodness! What a notable seal did it affix to the Divine call of the prophet! Who could now doubt, in whose name and authority he appeared upon the plains of Jericho! And what a mild luster did it reflect upon the whole prophetic character of the holy man! Surely no herald of Jehovah had ever entered upon his course in a more evangelical spirit than Elisha. The removal of a curse that had afflicted the land for centuries was his first act. The restoration of a withered earthly paradise was the first seal of his high commission.

We want to see this miracle at Jericho spiritually repeated in our times. We long for it; we implore it. Alas! our streams have become stagnant, corrupted, poisoned, and send forth rivers of death, threatening with moral destruction, not merely a city and neighborhood, but a world. The springs to which I allude, are the modes of thinking so prevalent in this age; the immoral, anarchical, and antichristian principles, that, like a corrupting leaven, infect the mass of the people, and control the judgments and actions of thousands. Witness our pursuits of science, falsely so called, which, casting aside all restraint, and giving loose to the most unbridled pretensions, seek to reduce all Divine mysteries within their own narrow limits. Witness our poetry, whose wit is kindled from beneath, whose inspiration is worldly or carnal lust, and in which a bold contempt of all that is moral and decent often assumes the air of genius. Witness our philosophical theology, the object of which is, to disprove the necessity of an atonement, to undeify the Savior of the world, and to annul all difference between the creation and Him whose word called it into existence. Who can fail to perceive, while reflecting on these things, that our situation is similar to that of Jericho, that our moral springs are poisoned? Our journals and periodicals are conveying these bitter waters through every region; and who, that rightly appreciates them, can forbear taking up the lamentation of Jericho, the city of palms: "Alas! the water is naught, and the land barren!" But, oh!

ye of the spirit of Elisha, ye faithful few, to whom the good salt of the word is entrusted, withhold not your hand. Produce it upon all occasions in your new vessels, yes, in any new form you please, but take heed that it be the unadulterated salt, for that alone, under the Divine blessing, can effect the marvellous healing which is needed everywhere. In the name of the Lord cast it into our polluted streams and rivers, and you will accomplish incomparably greater things than did Elisha, for you will renovate a world.

03.04. The Judgment at Bethel: 2Ki_2:23-25

Chapter 2 The Judgment at Bethel

2 Kings 2:23-25

"They compassed me about like bees," saith the psalmist; and his words may well direct our thoughts from the tried believer, to Him whose sufferings are often portrayed in the Psalms. The words have been fulfilled respecting Christ in every age; and wherever his Divine image is faithfully represented, his people also find that his opposers are restless and active. But, let Christ be our refuge and strength, and the more we are opposed, the more diligently let us abide in him.

"And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald-head; go up, thou bald-head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to Mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria." This event has, at first sight, a very repulsive aspect; and we feel as if it would have surprised us less, had we met with it in the history of Elijah. In that of Elisha it appears, at first, opposed to that peaceful character we have described. A deadly burst of vengeance upon a troop of wanton youths; a curse pronounced upon them in the name of the Lord! How characteristic of the legal dispensation! but how opposite to all we have said of the character and call of Elisha, as a messenger of the kindness and love of God our Savior! Yet summer does not cease to be summer, on account of an occasional chilling tempest, which, clearing away the vapors, opens to the earth freer access for the genial warmth of heaven. This apparent dissonance, as will soon appear, serves only to heighten the general harmony.

Here then is impious mockery cast at the prophet. Let us consider its origin, its nature, and its consequences.

03.05. The Origin of the Mockery

The Origin of the Mockery

Elisha now departs from Jericho on his way to Bethel, and doubtless under Divine direction. Carnal minds enjoy following their own dictates; but it is infinitely more safe and blessed to know, that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and that he delighteth in his way." Elisha quitted Jericho alone, but followed by the prayers and blessings of many grateful hearts. The peaceful and happy days which the sons of the prophets had enjoyed in his society, would not be forgotten by them. The whole city would bless the man of God, the instrument of their preservation; the benefits he had been the means of conferring being of more value than silver and gold. It was an honorable memorial which Elisha had established for himself in the hearts of the people, and in the surrounding country; or rather, it was a glorious memorial to the praise of Him, whose interpreter and minister he was, and who has declared, "My glory will I not give to another."

Bethel, whither he now directed his steps, was, as its name imports, a city once renowned as the house of God; but it now no longer merited that glorious distinction. The indignant prophet called it Beth-aven, that is, the house of vanity or iniquity, Hosea 10:5; because, together with Dan, it had become the seat of that idolatrous worship, which Jeroboam’s impious policy had established for the purpose of effecting an entire separation between Israel and Judah. To annihilate all desire in his subjects after the temple-worship of Jerusalem, he caused two new stations of central worship to be erected. The golden calves, one of which was set up at Bethel, and the other in Dan, were to supply, the place of the cherubim above the mercy-seat; for the king said unto the people, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." An illiterate priesthood, arbitrarily selected, without regard to lineage and Divine appointment, were to occupy the place of the house of Aaron; and instead of the beautiful and figurative worship of the temple, a variety of insignificant heathenish ceremonies were substituted, which tended, not only to banish all hopes concerning the Messiah, but likewise gradually to eradicate from the minds of the infatuated multitude, all idea of the true worship of God. How impious thus to lower the highest interests of man into subservience to mere worldly policy! and how lamentable that the case of Israel is not the only instance of so detestable a scheme! Similar attempts have frequently been made in the world, though nothing is more offensive and provoking to the Almighty. That Jeroboam succeeded in his nefarious scheme is not surprising, if the natural depravity of man be considered. Many in our own days can boast of similar achievements. To divert the people from the temple of the true church, Jeroboam did not directly deny the necessity of the temple-worship, but erected another to resemble and to rival it; and having done so, he cried, "Come up hither! This is the true church! This is Jerusalem! Here the pure light shines!" In like manner the modern corrupters of the church have also their Christianity; but it is a Christianity as essentially different from that of Christ, as was the worship of the golden calves from the religion of Abraham and of Moses. To the Christ whom they profess to honor, they have denied the crown of Deity, and the priestly garments, and have left him but a fragment of his prophetic mantle. The devotion of their worship is but a

self-complacent glow of natural feeling and sentimentality; and their prayers are of the most extraordinary character, being dictated by unmeaning sensibility, and expended in ejaculations without an object. And yet our modern Beth-aven teems with worshippers; our Israel have forsaken the spiritual Jerusalem, and the true temple. Thus "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived; but their folly shall be manifest unto all men."

Elisha could take no complacency in such a Bethel, nor could the Bethelites bestow any welcome on him. He was a messenger of Israel's covenant God; no wonder, therefore, that he was assailed with scoffing and derision in this abode of darkness and unbelief. It is not under the Christian dispensation alone, that the children of God have had to feel the truth of the declaration, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." The saints in all ages have painfully experienced the rancor of that enmity, which, from the beginning, was suffered to arise between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. If the world's enmity against the children of God appear a mystery, it is sufficiently explained by that declaration of our Lord: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." The world cannot tolerate our separation from themselves, or that we should rise above their standard of moral excellence. They require us courteously to follow in their track, to adopt their thoughts and sentiments, and to copy their actions, and if we only comply, we secure their favor and friendship. But the moment we show symptoms of desertion, the question of peace is at an end. The reason is obvious. Our departure from their ranks, our rejection of their maxims and customs, their vanities and enjoyments, is a more decided and emphatic condemnation of them, than can possibly be expressed in words. Every converted man is too powerful a contrast to their own character: he admonishes them, too forcibly of the necessity of a change, and of the possibility of rising into a more holy and elevated sphere of action than their own. But they love darkness, and cannot bear the light; they love vanity, and sport themselves with their own deceivings. They wish not to be disturbed in their carnal security. What wonder, then, if they have the strongest antipathy for those who cause the light to shine around them! Brethren, if we experience personally little or nothing of this enmity from the world, it is no very favorable sign for us, but should make us pause and consider, how far we are really faithful to our Lord and Master. Hath he not said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you?" Can his true disciples easily avoid being at one time or at another reviled, persecuted, or calumniated, for his name's sake? The indications of our high birth must surely be too faint, and its light can shine but little before men, if the worldly can take complacency in it, and remain worldly at our side. Surely, then, we are indulging them in their self-delusion by our own conformity to the world. The courtesy we commonly receive from them may be attributed to the lifelessness of our religion; which, if it contained more of the Divine unction, of the fire from off the altar of the sanctuary, would cause the whole appearance of things to be changed. The true man of God can never expect to pass unmolested through Dan or Beth-aven; for, while he is "a savor of life" to all that believe, he is to the unbeliever "a savor of death unto death."

03.06. The Nature of the Mockery

The Nature of the Mockery

Elisha was pursuing his solitary way to Bethel, and we may believe him to have been not without recollections and meditations of the deepest interest, if we reflect only upon his recent experiences. We here can hardly help being reminded of his forefather Jacob, on his solitary journey to this very place, and of his communion with God; but we can better imagine than describe the prophet's present emotions. Elevated and invigorated by his contemplations of the past, how painful must have been the contrast of the scenes of moral darkness which actually surrounded him! The holy ground where Jacob was constrained to exclaim, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;" how entirely, how mournfully, was it changed! Bethel had become a Beth-aven, a house of wickedness. The place once dedicated to the glory and praise of Jehovah, was now a refuge of lies, and of every idolatrous abomination. But for what purpose, might Elisha have thought, could the Lord be sending him hither? Perhaps, many a bright ray of hope had begun to shine through the gloom of his melancholy reflections, and he might suppose that possibly God intended by his means to transform this place again into a Bethel. However, he advances towards the polluted city.

It is not unlikely, that it was already known in Bethel what sort of a man was approaching its gates, and the prince of darkness was already on the alert to keep his palace, and to guard his territories. In Elisha he beheld an enemy, whom, probably, he dreaded more than he had dreaded the Tishbite. This may seem at first sight incredible; for how simple and unpretending was the appearance of the husbandman from Abel-meholah, compared with that prophet whose spirit and power were as the lightnings of heaven; so swiftly could they inflict death and destruction. But the most zealous asserters of the law are not regarded by the adversary as his most formidable opponents. He well knows that the holy law of God, far from melting the hardened heart into a willing surrender of itself to the Lord, becomes, through human depravity, the occasion whereby sin works in us all manner of concupiscence; for the rebellious disposition of man only spurns its holy restraint the more, the nearer it is brought to him. The gospel, on the contrary, the sweet message of mercy, fills the enemy of souls with real alarm for his kingdom. He knows its secret energy, its power to allure, convince, and subdue; and he is never more active in opposition, than when its sounds penetrate within his dominions. How then could he remain neutral, when he beheld Elisha approaching one of his most devoted cities? He was aware of the blessings which this man of God had conferred upon Jericho, which portended to him the loss of that city and neighborhood, and for aught he knew, the loss of Bethel also. He, therefore, hastens to take his measures, and has his agents ready at hand; most probably those lying priests who were always his willing instruments. He suggests to them the danger that threatens them; he incites their jealousy and rage, and points out to them the carnal weapons with which they might most readily assail the enemy of their dignity and rule. The priests, we may suppose, instigated a rabble of hardened and impudent youths to try the prophet's firmness, by going out of the town to meet him and insult him. This young generation of vipers think themselves men enough to encounter the

odious prophet.

Elisha arrives within the precincts of the idolatrous place; not to curse and to destroy it; no, but with the gracious design of collecting backsliders under the banner of love; when, behold, the rabble of rude clamorous youths rush wildly out of the gates of the city! Our version says, "little children," but the words in the original also signify young people. They come behind the man of God as he is going up to the town; they raise a loud and insolent laugh, and are not ashamed to cast at him the lowest and most offensive mockery, making even his venerable appearance the subject of their profane raillery.

Baldness was regarded by the lower orders as a kind of disgrace; for as it was one of the usual consequences of the leprosy, so it was accounted a sign of personal and mental degradation. Hence, in using this opprobrious epithet, the young profligates had a most malicious intention. Their expressions are not to be viewed as a mere burst of youthful wantonness; but as poisoned arrows, pointed and directed by refined and satanic malignity. It is as if they had said, "Thou effeminate leper! thou would-be prophet! we fear thee not! Go up! Go up!" as if they meant, "Imitate thy master! Enter thy fiery chariot, and follow him through the clouds!" It seems to have been a scoffing allusion to the ascent of Elijah; partly skeptical, and partly in derision of Elisha. "Wilt thou ape the dreaded Elijah? then magnify thy office, and show thyself." At all events, it was more than a mere sally of childish unruliness: it was the deliberate rancor of rooted and audacious impiety. The well known and mild demeanor of Elisha (for he was no stranger to them) seems to have unfettered their impious spirits. And the fact, that their hatred could overcome the power of that love, which beamed upon them in the whole appearance of this man, renders their crime the more aggravated. Who is not penetrated with grief while contemplating this melancholy spectacle? Alas! we cannot but believe that these youths were hastening to perdition. Better had it been for them to have been sacrificed in their infancy to the fiery idol Moloch, than to have thus survived, to become the victims of sin and Satan, and to die the death of the impenitent. But did such an evil generation disappear from the earth with the forty and two at Bethel? Alas! the present rising generation everywhere proves the contrary. It is one of the greatest afflictions of these evil times, that we look to many of them in vain for the hope of better times at hand. It is heart-rending to behold our youth drinking of those intoxicating fountains at which their fathers have so intemperately indulged, and to know that they are initiated in vain, theoretic, and infidel notions, which alienate the heart from God, and dissolve the most sacred obligations. Alas! the seed so thickly sown, is already springing up around us, luxuriantly rank. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge." O ye parents, masters, and teachers, how many of you have torn down long ago the barrier of God’s word, and destroyed all reverence for it! and now you have yourselves to blame, that you are surrounded by a youthful band of rebels, whom you despair of controlling. You have taught them to view scriptural Christianity as an ignominious chain, forged by superstition in a dark age, and to regard those who preach it as canting hypocrites, or weak and gloomy fanatics; and though we now admonish them, in the name of God, to honor and obey their parents, yet with what effect we do it, you yourselves are painfully aware. You have filled them with conceits of the independence of man and of human reason, and it is but a just retribution that you have been the first bitterly to feel, in their misbehavior to yourselves, the sad consequences of your pernicious instructions. Should any imagine this description of our youth to be overwrought, let them only inspect many families and schools, and the most superficial

observation will convince them of its truth. Alas! how many of our young plants are corrupted at the core! the very roots are rottenness; undutiful, and presumptuously obstinate; initiated from infancy in every mystery of iniquity and impiety, of whom no one would say, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" strangers even to the show of filial obedience, modest submission, and respect to parents and superiors; they laugh at the rebuke of love, and spurn restraint with rebellious defiance. Those of low degree are vulgar, headstrong, and licentious; those of high degree are morally enervated, filled with vanity, and trusting in a lie. May God have mercy on the future age for which this generation is ripening! My brethren, the foundations of antichrist are laid; they are laid in the hearts of our children. The man of sin will have only to shake this human tree, and his disciples will fall into his arms like ripe fruit! The budding branches of the fig tree are full of sap, and their maturity is nigh. May God, in his mercy, overrule the approaching ruin and desolation!

03.07. The Consequences of Mockery

The Consequences of Mockery

Such then was the origin and character of the young, but presumptuous blasphemers who insulted the prophet at the gates of Bethel. They were instigated by the agency of the father of lies, and had entered upon a course the very opposite to that of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Had not this conduct been punished in the awful manner in which it was, the authority of Elisha among the people might have been greatly impaired; the insolence of his opposers would have been raised to a higher pitch, and might have known no bounds. Doubtless, this was what our inveterate adversary desired to accomplish, that Elisha's spiritual influence might be put down at once, his prophetic work abolished, his mission stripped of its glory, and his person rendered ridiculous (as a false prophet) in the eyes of the people. The same method is still pursued by our great adversary in his opposition to the witnesses of God. If he cannot make them suspected as hypocrites or fanatics, he derides them to the multitude as contemptible and weak men, and therefore as false prophets. In this manner has he sought to destroy the influence of many a faithful Christian minister, and especially of one whom you well remember among yourselves. Nevertheless, that holy man stood (like an ancient confessor) unshaken as a rock, and continued joyfully to testify of Christ. He did not, as is so frequently the case at present, aim at countervailing the offence of the cross, by diluting the gospel, or by dressing it up in high flown eloquence. God was with that worthy man, and blessed his ministry. No wild beasts devoured his revilers, but they were visited with the thunderbolts of bankruptcy and penury—the badges of public contempt. He raised his servant from the dust, wherein they had sought to trample him; he gave double energy and point to his words, and so remarkably owned and prospered his work, that even the ungodly were constrained secretly to acknowledge that "the Lord was with him!" The transaction then before the gates of Bethel was not one that could be silently passed over. The attack on the cause of God was too serious to be met with clemency and forbearance. Of this Elisha was perfectly sensible. The indignity offered to himself he might easily have brooked but higher considerations prescribed to him, in this case, a different course. His authority in Israel was at stake, and with it the results of his prophetic mission. His rising feelings of compassion and love must, therefore, here be sacrificed to the honor and cause of Jehovah, the true God of Bethel and of Israel. This required the exercise of painful self-denial in a man of Elisha's gentle character; but a sacred public spirit sustained him, and higher considerations for the general good prevailed over him. The man of God turned towards the reckless mob, beheld them with holy indignation, and "cursed them in the name of the Lord." Many interpreters, wishing to soften the matter, represent the prophet as only reproving them for their impiety, and threatening them, unless they reformed, with Divine judgments. But this attempt to save Elisha's honor is gratuitous and misplaced. The words here used by the inspired penman oblige us to believe, that Elisha, under Divine direction, positively announced to his revilers the signal displeasure of the God of Israel. The Lord confirmed the word of his servant, and affixed to it a dreadful seal. Scarcely had the awful words escaped the prophet's lips, when, behold, two raging bears, the terrible executioners of heavenly vengeance,

rush forth from a neighboring wood; commence the work of destruction upon the godless rabble, and desist not until forty and two of them are torn in pieces. Those fierce avengers then returned quietly into the gloom of their forest, without the least molestation offered to the man of God. But what an awful judgment! What an astounding event to Bethel, and to the whole country! That it was a Divine visitation could admit of no dispute; otherwise it had not been even a likely occurrence that so many human beings should have been destroyed, as in a moment, by such means as these. Nothing but the keenest hunger could have incited such animals to attack the human species, and not even that to attack so many at once. That two such creatures should rush upon a whole band of vigorous youths was a thing unnatural and unknown. That hunger had not impelled them was evident, from their tearing one victim after another, and then deserting them all; for the history implies that they did not devour them. It is, therefore, most evident, which indeed the sacred history, with equal plainness, intimates, that this was a special visitation of God, who, in the exercise of his almighty power, can appoint at one time ravenous birds to carry sustenance to his servants, and at another raging bears to become the agents of his righteous displeasure. The event produced some salutary results. Though it did not suffice to change the minds of the idolatrous Bethelites, it put them under the restraint of bit and bridle, and served to secure, at least for a time, not only to the prophet, but to all the pious remnant in Israel, exemption from gross outrage and injustice. It is of the same character with the summary execution of the golden calf worshippers at the foot of Sinai; with the judgment inflicted on Ananias and Sapphira at the very commencement of the New Testament church; and was intended to produce a similar effect. It proclaimed in characters of blood, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked;" and great fear must naturally have come upon all the people. A deep and awful impression of the Divine severity must have bound the spirit of blasphemy and scorn, as with chains of brass; and the children of the prophets, those at least in Bethel, would enjoy some respite from persecutions and indignities, to which we may well suppose they had been hitherto exposed. The horrible image of the two terrible avengers, would seem to guard like sentinels the dwellings of God’s servants. The shields of the mighty were now seen to cover the prophet’s head, and the glittering sword of the Lord to be ready, if required, to devour the adversaries. But greatly as the punishment inflicted on this impious band of youths contributed to establish the dignity of the prophet, and important as was the impulse given by it to his work in Israel, and to the advancement of the word of truth, meekness, and righteousness, the spirit of the man of God would be so far from elated at any triumph of his own, that, doubtless, if any one lamented that the honor of God rendered such severity needful, it was Elisha himself. Many, had they been honored with such a triumph as his, would not have retired till they had witnessed the splendid consequences of the fearful infliction, or at least had gratified themselves with the altered position and obsequious respect of their opponents. Elisha desired no such gratification, but hastened from the place, as though he had been the vanquished party, and sought retirement on Mount Carmel. Does this surprise us? It need not, if we consider that the prophet found himself in a sphere of action directly at variance with his amiable and evangelical spirit. He, who was so disposed to forbearance and pardon, had been the instrument of a dreadful punishment; he, who was so especially fitted, by the peculiar structure of his mind, to administer consolation and healing, found himself suddenly armed with the sword of Divine vengeance, and, for a while, commissioned to scatter death and destruction around him. We may imagine that he hardly recognized himself, and that his very office seemed changed; so heavily would the horrible catastrophe depress his affectionate spirit. Not only would

the mangled carcases of his revilers be constantly present to his imagination, but the awful condition of the souls whom his curse had precipitated into the presence of their Judge, would continually distress a mind like his. How should he regain that former happy serenity of which this tragic event must have greatly deprived him? How should he hush that tumult of horror, pity, and amazement, which must have agitated his soul? He was, indeed, aware, that the Lord had commissioned him to pronounce the judgment; but this consciousness would be insufficient, of itself, to restore composure. What else could he do, except to seek in retired solitude fresh converse with his God? In the shadow of the Lord’s hand must he hide himself, and there regain his self-possession. From him, he must obtain renewed assurances that he had done right, that he had acted in His name, by His imperative command, and as His instrument. He, therefore, flees from Bethel, and hastens to Mount Carmel, to pour out, in the solitude and silence of its groves, his oppressed soul before the Lord, and to calm its agitating impressions in devotional retirement.

Here we leave him, and conclude our reflections with rejoicing in the strengthening conviction, that God identifies the honor of his faithful servants with his own, and that all contempt of them is regarded by him as a contempt of Himself. Supported by this consideration, we may well deem it a small thing to be judged of man’s judgment, or to bear with the injustice of the world. If their arrows fly upwards, we may well allow them to pass harmlessly over our heads, without exciting our envy at the evil doers: for rather should we pity them, and cry, "Father, forgive them." It is true, God at present endures with much long suffering those who oppose his cause and despise his people. He seldom inflicts summary judgment as he did for Elisha at Bethel. If in this life he punish the revilers of his faithful servants, it is rather by concealing from them the true glory of real Christians, than by displaying it openly. Such is the nature of that service to which we belong, that it is the service of the cross; and the inscription on its banner for our direction on the way, is, "Onward." But, a day will come, when the King shall assert the honors of Zion, and present her to his enemies as his chosen bride, arrayed in his own glory. What astonishment and confusion of face will then be manifested! Till then let us bear the cross patiently, and be contented to be despised and unknown. We know ourselves. We already see though darkly, yet assuredly, in the mirror of God’s word, something of what we shall be; therefore let us never faint, nor be discouraged that the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Amen.

03.08. The Expedition against Moab: 2Ki_3:9-12

Chapter 3 The Expedition against Moab

2 Kings 3:9-12

"My tongue is the pen of a ready writer," Psalms 45:1. So speaks the royal psalmist, when about to utter glorious mysteries concerning the King, who is fairer than the children of men. David, like all the other prophets of God, was an instrument of the Holy Spirit, who spake by his tongue, and pen, and song; employing these to convey to mankind enlarged ideas of his everlasting kingdom, as also to express reproofs, corrections, and instructions.

Probably those inspired writers themselves sometimes knew but little of the import of what they uttered, though they never appear to have been entire strangers to it. David not only said, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer;" but he introduced it by saying, "My heart is inditing a good matter," so that his heart was likewise engaged. Such Divine messengers were themselves feasted, while they administered to others. But, beyond a doubt, much passed through their hearts that was but half appreciated; much that was but darkly understood; and much that was quite enigmatical and veiled. No authors ever occupied a position so peculiar with reference to their own productions, or ever felt so deep an interest in those very productions, as did the penmen of prophecy, 1 Peter 1:10-12. Their own writings afforded them abundant matter for reflection and research. How often must they have afterwards discovered depths and wonders in their inspired songs and addresses, of which they were hardly conscious while penning them! How many unsuspected treasures of wisdom and consolation must they have met with in their own writings, as their minds became more and more enlightened for that purpose! Surely, then, the great truths which they declared should deeply interest our minds, especially as it was to us, more than to themselves, that they ministered them, 1 Peter 1:12. After the Sun of Righteousness had arisen, the shadows of the Old Testament passed away, and all its wonderful mysteries and prophecies began to receive their luminous fulfillment. Christ has the key of David, to open every mystery, having brought life and immortality to light. The lives and actions, as well as the writings, of Old Testament prophets and kings, were not infrequently full of sacred mystery.

"So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days’ journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel’s servants answered and said, Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him." The scene is here changed to war and battle; but it presents much that is interesting and instructive. The embarrassment of the kings, and their application to Elisha, are the two subjects to which we are to direct our attention.

03.09. The Embarrassment of the Kings

The Embarrassment of the Kings

Jehoram is incited by a vexatious occurrence to prepare for war. The Moabites, a heathen people on the southern frontier of his kingdom, had raised the standard of revolt. This unruly people, whom God had given into the hands of the Israelites, and of whom David once triumphantly declared, "Moab is my washpot!" had again and again struggled to throw off the yoke; but had invariably experienced how vain it is to fight against God. Their rebellion, however, had now assumed a more important and alarming character. They had risen in mass, with king Mesha at their head, declaring themselves independent; and seemed resolved to perish, rather than to continue to pay the tribute that had been imposed on them by the princes of Israel. The revolt of Moab was unquestionably an act of national guilt; but it was no less a Divine chastisement upon Jehoram, who had forsaken the God of his fathers, and had addicted himself to the idolatry of the golden calves. Of this wickedness he was to be made sensible; and, therefore, God let loose the lion-like men of Moab, and permitted them to rebel.

Jehoram was not a little disturbed at the intelligence of this event; and, spurning negotiation, which he rightly considered derogatory to his dignity, he adopted the most energetic measures, and drew the sword. He had nothing to apprehend from other neighboring powers; nevertheless, he requested Jehoshaphat, the pious king of Judah, to render his important aid, and to conduct into the field a part of his own numerous army. "I will come up," replied Jehoshaphat to the king of Israel; "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." When the two princes had united their forces, it became necessary to deliberate on their line of march. Jehoram advised proceeding through the wilderness of Edom, and this route was the one which they adopted. When they arrived in Edom the king of that country, who was a tributary of Jehoshaphat, joined the army with his horsemen; they then advanced together through the desert to attack the enemy, who, drawn out upon the plain, and confident in their numbers and enthusiasm, were exulting in the anticipation of a glorious triumph. The three allies likewise flattered themselves with the same hopes. But they, or at least Jehoram and the king of Edom, had trusted in an arm of flesh. The admirable equipment and discipline of their troops had inspired them with a courage, which left them no room to doubt that the first encounter would be decisive in their favor, and open to them a way to the capital. But, as often happens in similar circumstances, Israel had miscalculated, as well as Moab. The affair takes quite a different turn from what either party had expected. Both the Israelites and the heathen were again to feel that whatever might be the issue, it was not to be brought about by an arm of flesh, or by human wisdom, but only by Him, who doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. He is the Dispenser of courage and of fear. He directs the arrow to its mark, or turns it aside. His alliance is victory, and his displeasure destruction. At His command the sun can put forth its hottest beams, and whole armies languish and pine away. He can send forth irresistible frost, and the limbs of his adversaries are fettered with invisible chains. He can bring pestilence and famine upon a country, and what then avails the warrior’s prowess, or the commander’s skill?

It was, indeed, an imposing force, at the head of which the two kings advanced against Moab, and the general impression was, that the sight of such an army would be sufficient to annihilate insurrection and revolt. But another enemy unexpectedly appears, against which none had calculated; and the combined armies of Israel, of Judah, and of Edom, were threatened with imminent destruction, before they had even reached the Moabitish frontier: for after they had advanced some days march through the wilderness, the heat had become intolerable, the waters in every direction had dried up, and the troops were exhausted and enervated. The increasing thirst of the soldiers soon consumed the supply of water in the camp; and now, weak, dejected, and languishing, they were in danger of perishing by a most terrible death. Their leaders would have pushed on, to reach, if possible, a more favorable and better watered region; but in vain. Nowhere was a spring or a supply of water to be found; nor even a shady wood, where they might take shelter and repose. On every side was only a flat and parched heath, swept by a burning and suffocating wind. After "fetching a compass seven days" their march is totally arrested. The fainting warrior falls gasping to the earth; the horse, overpowered with fatigue and thirst, can no longer proceed, and the camels sink exhausted under their burdens. In this extreme embarrassment and peril, the idolatrous Jehoram becomes uneasy on another account. His conscience, like a lion invigorated by sleep, awakens within him, and suggests to him something about the cause and consequences of this unforeseen emergency. It is natural for an evil conscience to give things a dismal tinge; for it is from conscience that every condition in this life borrows its coloring. Yes, and let it be only cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, and it sheds brightness upon whatever may happen to us; cheering interpretations are suggested by it, and it robs each affliction of its sting. On the other hand, the whole world cannot furnish a power equal to that of a condemning conscience. It is a power that can make the hero tremble, and deprive the most valiant of their courage; it can force its upbraiding through the plaudits of a world, so as to convert the choicest earthly possessions into dreariness and wretchedness. "An evil conscience," says Luther, "is like a tormenting spirit, it is alarmed in the middle of outward prosperity." Scripture also declares, that "the wicked flee when no man pursueth," and that "the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them."

"Alas!" cried the king of Israel, "that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!" "With the pure," sings David, "thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself unsavory." Even when the designs of God are fraught with mercy, the surmises of an evil conscience are evil. In the Divine chastisements it discerns only a rod of anger; and in circumstances which He has brought about for the display of his power to save, it sees only preparations for destruction. "These three kings," says Jehoram; he considers not only the viceroy of Edom, but also the pious Jehoshaphat, as included with himself in the same condemnation. The great difference between his own character and that of the king of Judah, he entirely overlooks. That the sentence had gone forth against himself alone, he neither will perceive, nor suffer others to intimate Sinners imagine to themselves consolation from having companions in their guilt and punishment; but the Lord, who knoweth those that are his, will in due time cast down every such imagination.

03.10. The Kings Visit Elisha

The Kings Visit Elisha To Jehoram’s desponding exclamation, Jehoshaphat, the noble king of Judah, quickly replied. His words evince more firmness and composure, and appear to have proceeded from a heart accustomed to recognize in the God of heaven not only a Judge, but a Friend. But, it may be asked, if Jehoshaphat was so in favor with the Almighty, why was he involved in the same calamity with apostate Jehoram? We answer that for this he had himself to blame. If good men make common cause with the ungodly, they must not complain if the lightning, which descends upon the house where they are met, should involve them in one common ruin. The king of Judah was justified in lending help to Jehoram; but to reply with such an excess of cordiality and friendship, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people," and to abstain from every, the most remote, intimation, that he had merited the revolt of the Moabites by his own apostasy from the God of his fathers, was unworthy of a son of David. Such obsequiousness to an idolatrous renegade, was, to say the least, very weak and ill-judged. It was necessary that a sense of this fault should deeply affect the good king’s mind, for present humiliation and for future wisdom; hence even he was not exempted from the common calamity. In one respect it was the same scourge alighted on them both, but in another respect it was not the same. Jehoram was punished, but Jehoshaphat was chastened. But chastisements are visitations of our heavenly Father’s love. The cup of Job was not sweet; the chastening appointed to Lazarus was not joyous; the messenger of Satan permitted to buffet the apostle, was still less welcome to flesh and blood. But these things are all very different from the curse of the law; otherwise the Redeemer died and rose in vain. King Jehoshaphat then, instead of breaking out into pusillanimous despondency, directs his thoughts to God; to the Lord Jehovah, in whom is the help of everlasting, strength. "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord," he asks, "that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" How cheering is this voice crying in such a dreary wilderness! The cry of God’s people cannot remain long unheard. But the noble prince inquires for a prophet. Why did he not in person approach the throne of God, and make known his solicitude? Does it not seem, as though some consciousness of guilt had closed and barred the way? Perhaps his sinful compliance with the world had given rise to fears, which had now ascended like a dark cloud between his soul and God. Prophets, however, were often consulted upon any great public or private emergency. God’s oracles, delivered through prophets and apostles, still remain to us in the Holy Scriptures; oh that these were oftener consulted by ourselves, for they are suited to every emergency, rank, and condition!

One of king Jehoram’s attendants replied, that there was a prophet at hand. And who was he? No other than Elisha, the son of Shaphat, "which poured water on the hands of Elijah;" that is, who had acted as his servant and attendant. But how was it that Elisha is suddenly so near at hand in this burning and frightful wilderness? We remember that after the bloody scene at Bethel he retired into solitude to Mount Carmel. After remaining some time there in communion with God, by whose gracious visitations his spirit appears to have been strengthened, he returned in the name of the Lord to the field of his labors and directed his steps towards Samaria. Upon his arrival there, the united armies of Israel were about to march against Moab. Incited by love, and guided by the Spirit

of the Lord, he appears to have attended at a distance the camp of his nation. The weapons, indeed, with which he had girded himself, were not carnal. His sword was the word of God, and faith was his shield and buckler. He probably considered, that circumstances might arise in which his important services for the honor of the Lord God of Israel would be pressingly required. A timely word of his might decide the fate of battle; and he knew that prayer, the prayer of faith, is better than weapons of war. He remembered the uplifted hands of Moses, and the wonder-working prayer of Samuel; and, animated with cheerful courage, he followed the host to the field, bearing the whole people upon his interceding heart; but who would have imagined that this plain, unarmed man, covered with a mantle, should be the instrument of preserving the armies of Israel from the most terrible destruction? The name of Elisha was scarcely uttered before their desponding hearts revived, and Jehoshaphat joyfully exclaimed, "The word of the Lord is with him!" He knew the prophet, and believed in his Divine inspiration and commission. Here "the king" discovers that he "putteth his trust in God;" a sparkle of the concealed gem, which he bore about with him, and which in every situation rendered him essentially different from the world of the ungodly, now showed itself.

What a spirited and faithful delineation of real life is Scripture history! It can scarcely be said to narrate: short and simple are its sketches, yet its pictures are the most animated and impressive. It sets us in the middle of every scene, and we seem familiarly acquainted with all its personages, in their difficulties, dispositions, and characters. The prophet was now to be consulted. But how was it to be done? In some less promising emergency a messenger might have been sent to fetch him. But at present, even Jehoram is of opinion, that this would not be treating the honored servant of God with becoming respect; therefore the three kings resolve to go to him themselves in person, and they repair immediately towards the quarter where he had been seen. It was not long before they found him, and ready to comply with their wishes. Imagine the holy man seated under some solitary shelter in this wilderness of Idumea. The princes approach him, and their submissive and supplicating attitude sufficiently indicates the nature of their visit. What an affecting scene of three monarchs, the rulers of Israel, Judah, and Edom, in the humble attitude of suppliants, before the lowly husbandman of Abel-meholah! Of him are they seeking counsel and help, under circumstances wherein their own wisdom had "utterly fallen;" at his hand they look for a change of affairs, which all their own power had failed to accomplish. He was to intercede, as their representative, with the Almighty, and to obtain for them deliverance and victory. Elisha is now their sole remaining earthly counsellor. What a triumph for the prophet, or rather for Him in whose service he appeared, and whose cause he conducted! And thus it not infrequently happens that in times of severe distress, the servants of God are called forth to sudden honor. When earthly supports are found too weak, when the resources of human wisdom and power are exhausted, then have even slanderous enemies become disposed to confess, that the people of God are to be envied; and to them will they now have recourse, as if they thought themselves safer near them than elsewhere; yes, as if they were sensible of the invisible defence with which the righteous are always encompassed. Those who previously would have spurned the exhortations of "the quiet in the land," show at once a ready ear for them, and even find comfort in knowing that the prayers of some one of this despised community are offered up in their behalf. At such times a wicked Ahab will put more confidence in his devout chamberlain, than in all his generals and ministers, yea, than in all his own majesty, his chariots and horsemen. Thus the world is obliged, in many ways, and often against its will, to acknowledge, "Ye are the blessed of the Lord which hath made

heaven and earth." Your Lord, he is the God, and to you He grants such access as we are unconscious of Testimonies of this kind extorted from the ungodly, redound greatly to the honor of the gospel, and serve as additional proofs, that the world in itself possesses nothing but poverty and despondency. Then let his people give glory to His name, that He has chosen them out of the world and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son.

If it be true that destruction would not have come upon the city of Sodom, had ten righteous persons been found there; if it be true that "the Lord will fulfil the desire of those that fear Him," and that he who prays in the name of Jesus, shall never pray in vain; then it is not superstitious fancy that induces men in times of imminent danger to place peculiar dependence on the presence of righteous persons among them. Such persons, like living conductors, turn the lightning from the neighborhood in which they dwell. Wherever they reside, eternal Love resides with them, and the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them; the windows of heaven are open to pour down blessings on such a place, and invisible bulwarks are planted about it.

Therefore I prize thee, my own beloved valley, wherein so many of the children of God can be numbered; that thou canst rejoice in entire districts, where every house is a tabernacle of God among men, and of many houses in which not a single ungodly character can be discerned. Dost thou not perceive, that, for this reason, God hath made an hedge about thee? How often have threatening dangers enveloped thy very confines, and then rolled away like angry clouds, so that in thy sky scarcely anything has been visible, except the rainbow of peace, and showers of blessing! Value then the people of God residing in the middle of thee; despise them not, but bless them. Thou partakest of the goodness with which He crowns them; and, though they cannot save thee at last, except thou become entirely the Lord’s, they are a blessed means of thy temporal prosperity and security, a means whereby the bounties of Heaven descend upon all thy children.

Chapter 60

03.11. The Miraculous Relief: 2Ki_3:13-19

Chapter 4 The Miraculous Relief

2 Kings 3:13-19 The times in which we live have, on more accounts than one, a serious aspect. That period of refining which awaits the church, appears to be near at hand. But true disciples stand upon a rock in the middle of the waves, and that rock consists of the grace, love, truth, power and faithfulness of their great King. May the reflections we are about to enter upon, serve to strengthen us in the belief of this!

"And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones."

We have seen the three sovereigns in the respectful attitude of suppliants before the prophet of God. Elisha anticipates the occasion of such unusual condescension by first addressing them. He was not embarrassed, nor even surprised at their visit. The Majesty of Heaven was too clearly before the eyes of his mind for him to be immoderately awed by human greatness. As all earthly greatness and glory appear very different in the eyes of God and of his holy angels, from what they commonly appear to men, so is this more or less the case with those who live near to God upon earth. Our present subject then opens with, I. Elisha’s address to the kings;

II. The minstrel; and III. The prophet’s directions.

03.12. Elisha's Address to the Kings

Elisha’s Address to the Kings

Elisha first addresses Jehoram. This unprincipled monarch merited an open rebuke. What had he cared hitherto for Jehovah, or for any of his prophets? But now that the Almighty had suddenly stopped him in his career, a reluctant submission is extorted from him, so that this son of Jezebel no longer feels it beneath him to approach one of the Lord’s prophets in the humblest manner, to obtain his advice, intercession, and assistance. But we may be quite sure, that Elisha was in no wise disposed to glory over him on this occasion. For if Jehoram now believed and trembled before God, it was only as "the devils believe and tremble." If he sought aid from above it was entirely from carnal and worldly motives. The king came to beg water for his army, not mercy for his soul. In his extremity he thought for once to make use of Jehovah and his prophets, and could his object be attained he would trouble himself no longer concerning either the one or the other. He did not seek first the Lord, and then His benefits. When the seer’s penetrating eye had for a moment surveyed the monarchs, his expression, usually so mild, assumed the gravity of awful rebuke, and the words he uttered were like arrows: "What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophet of thy mother!" Here is no triumph of human vanity, it is only the triumph of God over Baal, of truth over falsehood; it is an authoritative setting forth of idolatry in all its worthlessness, by an appeal to the king’s present despair and ignominy. But, distressing as is the occurrence of such exhibitions (and similar ones are not at all infrequent in common life), they have their bright side. In these exigencies the Lord is magnified, and his gospel triumphs, or at least its value is illustrated. But it is a fearful retribution, if, when despisers of God feel constrained to seek him in the hour of their calamity, and approach him with uplifted hands and agonized hearts, if they find, with Jehoram, every access to the Almighty closed against them; and their contempt being now requited with contempt, they receive from above the appalling reply, "What have I to do with thee? get thee to thy own gods, and let them help thee." Thus it was with those who are spoken of in the second chapter of Jeremiah, "They have turned their back unto me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble." Dreadful repulse! God forbid that we should ever experience it.

If the heart of Jehoram trembled when he appeared before Elisha, what must he have felt at this cutting salutation! "Nay," he replies; as meaning, Oh, say not so, for it is of no use now to get me unto them; for I am sensible of the supreme power and displeasure of Jehovah, and to Him must I apply. "For the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hands of Moab." Yes, the perverse apostate knew well, that Jehovah is God. Of that he had received sensible demonstration. Still all recognition of the Most High in Israel was odious to him, it disturbed him too much in his abominable and impious courses; therefore he sought to expel it from his soul, and to substitute the tolerant idols of Dan and Bethel. Now, however, when destruction is at his heels, he would hear nothing more of the golden calves, but professes to give glory to God. Yet what hath the Lord to do with such prevaricating homage? What, with merely the

fruit of selfish feelings? A time-serving religion is ever repudiated by him, and loathsome to him. Elisha, little affected by piety of this sort, replies with holy indignation, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." This was speaking the plain truth, and informing Jehoram at once how matters stood; namely, that if relief should be now granted, it would not be vouchsafed out of any respect to him, but for the sake of the pious Jehoshaphat. The ungodly monarch would, however, be permitted to share in the deliverance, though not wrought on his account. This was humiliating to such a prince of idolatry; yet any thing was to be apprehended, rather than that he would "be swallowed up with, overmuch sorrow." If he did but obtain help, his pusillanimous fears would be allayed; which was all he cared for.

How strikingly is the same discrimination of Divine Providence as was here exhibited in the wilderness of Edom, still observable from time to time! The preservation or victory of an army, though ascribed by the world to its discipline, or to the skill of its commander, is always far more properly attributable to God’s care of his people, some of whom had probably marched unnoticed in the ranks, while many more had remained otherwise defenseless at home. Thus also an alarming danger has passed harmlessly away from a town or village, and the preservation of the place has been attributed to some fortunate accident, or to the wise measures of magistrates; while the sole occasion of deliverance might, perhaps, have been sought in a few of the humblest intermingled dwellings, where prayers and intercessions were made by some "that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

03.13. The Minstrel

The Minstrel

Elisha having thus addressed Jehoram, a scene opens, which at its commencement must have appeared strange and unaccountable. Elisha, without assigning any reason, desires a minstrel to be brought before him. A minstrel is conducted into his presence, probably from among the military. At Elisha's bidding he tunes his instrument, strikes the chords, and plays before the prophet in the solitary wilderness. Elisha and the kings listen to the sweet minstrelsy in profound silence; the latter in anxious doubt as to what was to ensue; the former, soaring with the melodious harmony into higher regions. Of the kind of music which the minstrel played we are not informed. A trifling air, or a martial song, it is not likely to have been. The awful seriousness of the moment, and the presence of the man of God, on which the hopes of the whole army depended, must have sufficiently intimated to the musician what was proper for the occasion. Probably it was one of the well-known songs of Zion, which we may suppose were sometimes played and sung in the army.

Though music is one of the gifts of God, it is not to be numbered with those of the first order, such as our daily bread, his holy word, and many similar blessings. It must rather be classed with the flowers that shed their fragrance around us, and with the various delicious fruits that ripen for our enjoyment. It is intended to redound to the glory of His name, and to contribute to adorn, to cheer, and to soothe our existence. It is the universal dialect of feeling, and constitutes the appropriate medium of a sensibility too refined for common language. As giving expression to some of the tenderest susceptibilities of the soul, it is the most wonderful of the arts; and sometimes acts with very powerful influence. Hence it is a dangerous art, when employed in the service of the world, of vanity, and sin. But when applied to the uses for which it was originally intended, to the praise of the Lord, and the glory of his holy name, to celebrate the works of his hands in the beautiful objects of nature, and the goodness of his ways of providence and grace, and thus to give utterance and emphasis to the nobler and better feelings of the heart, how much of genuine beauty and blessing does it serve to diffuse over our personal and social existence in the life that now is! Luther, our great reformer, who is even celebrated to this day for his sublime compositions in sacred music, has feelingly expressed in some of his writings, his own experience of the truth of the preceding remarks.

Music was in frequent use among the ancient prophets, and was sedulously cultivated in their school. Saul met at the hill of God a company of prophets with psaltery, tabret, pipe, and harp, to the sound of which they sang their inspired songs, 1 Samuel 10:5; 1 Samuel 10:10. Music was here put to its legitimate use; for it was employed in the service of holiness. Its inspiration was the love of God, its breathings were raised by the Spirit of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord was its end and object. Thus consecrated from on high, and allied to the harmony of heaven, it ministered to peace and serenity around; to dispelling of discontent and care, to the suggestion and exercise of thought upon the highest subjects, and to the preparation of the mind for every gracious impression. To show how music, applied to holy purposes, can be the means of direct salutary

influence upon the soul, it is not necessary to adduce the example of David with his harp playing before Saul. Many of us have experienced it ourselves, and Elisha, who was a man of like passions as we are, was evidently not insensible of it. His spirit, which had been agitated with holy indignation against the son of Ahab, required immediate calming to its wonted equanimity, that it might be a fit mirror of heavenly and oracular light. And now, at the moment of recovered composure and self-possession, Jehovah approaches his prophet in the power of inspiration, as it is written, "The hand of the Lord came upon him." The Spirit of Christ, which was in him, did then signify what he was to declare, advise, and do.

03.14. The Prophet's Directions

The Prophet’s Directions The minstrel ceases, and Elisha communicates agreeable intelligence. How great are the mercies of God! Israel is not only to obtain water, but to subdue the rebels. "Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches. Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand. And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones." Such was the utterance of the prophet; at which every dejected countenance must have brightened with joy. The command was obeyed with alacrity, and ditches were formed. And when they had drawn the deep furrows over the parched soil of the valley, at which they appear to have worked all night, lo! the thirsty country glistens everywhere the next morning with rills of water, which had come by the way of Edom; and thereby was the whole fainting army not only rescued from death, but revived to new life and vigor. Now, this is but one of the many instances of that peculiar, but infinitely wise, method by which the God of providence displays his sparing mercy and preserving love. Yet it may be asked, Why was such an indirect method as this adopted? Would not the preservation of Israel’s army have been more simply and naturally secured by a prevention of the drought altogether? It would; but then Jehoram would have retained his golden calves; Jehoshaphat would have had one humbling experience less of the faithfulness of his God; and the army, attributing victory to their own prowess, would have thought, We are the men! We can command success! The pride of human nature would have been fostered, and Jehovah yet more dishonored and despised. But by the arrival of help and deliverance, after every fleshly arm had been enfeebled, the Lord alone was exalted in that day. His power and faithfulness were magnified in the sight of the nations; apostates were put to shame; the high looks of the high ones were brought down; believers were confirmed in their faith and courage; and enjoyment was enhanced by such an immediate granting of the goodness and beneficence of the Almighty. O ye children of God, take notice of all this, that you may not be too much cast down when he leads you over rugged paths and through desert places. Does the day of your earthly prosperity close in night? It is only that you may behold the Star of Bethlehem. Do the supports of human wisdom and counsel break under you? The Lord would only erect above them his throne of power and faithfulness. The Moabites, who had received intelligence of the advance of their enemies, were now assembled in battle array upon their frontiers. When the sun was up, and his rosy light first fell upon the water, the vanguard of the rebels, beholding it at a distance, supposed it to be blood. Thus the notion was rapidly spread from one to another that the kings were surely slain, having fallen out among themselves. Hence there was a universal shout, "Moab to the spoil!" and they rush forward, confident of victory. But who can describe their consternation at beholding the Israelitish squadrons advancing to meet them sword in hand! In a moment they are confounded, and flee in the utmost panic and disorder. The allied forces press hard upon them into their country; and, as had been predicted by the word of Jehovah, they demolished their cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone and filled it; and they stopped all their wells of water, and felled all

the good trees; only Kir-haraseth, the capital, they did not demolish, but they encompassed it about with their slingers, and threatened to level it likewise with the ground. Into this place the king of Moab had thrown himself, with the remainder of his fugitive troops; but soon perceiving that he should not be able to defend the city, he formed the desperate resolution of cutting his way through the enemy. He, therefore, sallied forth on that side of the city which was invested by the king of Edom, but being overpowered by numbers, he was again driven back within the walls. And now a horrible scene ensued. The king, frantic and desperate, suddenly appeared with his first-born son upon the battlements of Kir-haraseth. There he caused an altar to be erected, and sacrificed upon it his own child to propitiate the gods. The Israelites, at beholding such a horrifying spectacle of rage and despair, raised the siege, and retired to their own land, leaving the unfortunate king, with the wreck of his army, to seek safety in flight. The object of the campaign had been attained; the power of Moab was broken, the rebellion suppressed, and the country again placed under the scepter of the king of Israel.

———

"The Lord is a man of war, great and mighty in battle." It is well for us, if we are on His side, and He on ours. Then we advance from victory to victory; we break in pieces the mighty, like earthen vessels.

Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. He takes from us our cisterns, to supply us from his own fountains. He strikes away our supports from under us, not that we may fall, but that he may be himself our stay and staff; and he makes use of our perplexities to give us experience of his power, mercy, and truth. A heathen sage is said to have exclaimed, "Never complain of misfortune while Cesar is your friend!" But what shall we exclaim to those whom the King of kings and Lord of lords, is not ashamed to call his friends and his brethren! He hath said, to every one of them, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Should not this gracious declaration for ever banish all their fears and anxieties? He who hath Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, though he seem as having nothing, is truly possessing all things.

Privations, difficulties, and trials, are God’s providential means of hiding {Pride}pride from man; and it is only when pride will not be thus subdued, that men in their afflictions yield to despair. Pride, as in the case of Jehoram, is ever the cause of despair: and no wonder; for it is the cause of unbelief, and of all the bitter fruits of unbelief. And why, but because it will not deign to offer unto God one word of heartfelt supplication. What an insane and contemptible thing then is pride in the fallen children of Adam! Even "the fear of man," which "bringeth a snare," proceeds from pride. Do we not therefore see what a righteous thing it is in God to rebuke and punish this sin? Can we wonder that the fearful and the unbelieving, those who live and die under the influence of pride, must have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone? But God giveth grace to the humble. He is to the true Israel a Father of mercies and a God of all comfort; and with the Lord for our Shepherd, we can lack nothing. Therefore never can we be too dependent on Him; never too humble and poor in spirit. Herein is that saying true, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

Chapter 64

03.15. The Augmentation of the Oil: 2Ki_4:1-7

Chapter 5 The Augmentation of the Oil

2 Kings 4:1-7 The spiritual Zion is no abode of famine, drought, or desolation. Its fields are always green with abundance both in summer and winter; because "the Lord is there." Of this we are furnished with a pleasing instance in the history before us.

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil. Then he said, Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him. and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest. The Moabitish war having terminated in the signal defeat and reduction of the revolters, Elisha, who had returned home, is again employed in ministering blessings among the lowly and quiet in the land. Thus we have now to contemplate another instance of the peculiar character of his mission as a messenger and instrument of grace. The account is beautifully affecting, and well adapted to the strengthening of our faith. It relates, I. A poor widow’s distress;

II. Her application to the prophet; and III. Her miraculous relief.

03.16. A Poor Widow's Distress

A Poor Widow’s Distress The place of this remarkable occurrence is not mentioned. It may have been at Gilgal, where there was also a prophet’s seminary, like those in Jericho and Bethel, 1 Samuel 10:8-10. These institutions, of which Samuel appears to have been the originator and founder, were voluntary associations of men and youths, residing together under the same roof, or occupying cottages in the immediate vicinity of each other, supporting themselves by the labor of their hands, either at the plough, or in the vine and olive gardens. Their chief business was spiritual; and they devoted their time principally to the study of sacred history and the Divine revelations, as also to sacred music, and other arts and sciences dedicated to the service of God. A prophet always governed these institutions, as their teacher and paternal guide, who, when not commissioned to other service by the word of the Lord, resided as a welcome guest, sometimes at one, and sometimes at another of them; imparting wisdom by his conversation, quietly assembling them for instruction in the things of God, and uniting them in prayer and cheerful praise. These enlightened societies, to which can best be compared the missionary seminaries of modern days, contained the flower of Israel, and constituted those living temples, wherein the fire of Jehovah shone purest and brightest. They were to Israel, what Israel was to the world—the repositories of Divine truth. Often was the little remaining vigor of that nation’s spiritual life concentrated here; whence it issued forth afresh to revive the whole languid body of the Jewish people: for the Lord chose from these seminaries, not a few of his seers and prophets to plead his cause before the nations. Many of the pious and enlightened men, who were called "sons of the prophets," had wives and children; and of such was she who is here introduced to our notice, a widow of one of the sons of the prophets. Let us visit her abode of poverty. The naked walls, the empty shelves, the miserable table with a wooden bench before it, the straw pallet in the desolate chamber, sufficiently show her circumstances. But these are still more plainly declared by the pale and dejected countenance of the indigent widow. She is a daughter of Abraham, and not only after the flesh; for she knows the Lord, and is known of Him, who is a Father of the fatherless, and maintains the cause of the widow. She is aware that her portion is not in this life, but in a better country, that is, an heavenly. Without this animating consciousness she might even have perished in her affliction; for severe affliction had come upon her, one of the severest that can afflict humanity. Her husband, the glory of her house, had been torn away from her by an early death, and the world offered nothing to supply her loss, but much to embitter it; for she had also to experience what it is for a poor widow of a pious husband to fall into the hands of merciless men. However fervently he might have commended her on his death-bed to the protection of the Almighty, she was now not only in the deepest poverty, but loaded with debts. How these had been contracted we know not; but as it is well here to remember the state of the times, in reference to those of whom the world was not worthy, so it is enough for us to behold the widow in her embarrassment. Her creditor was importunate. She had already stript her house of all that was not indispensable, and sold it, in order to pacify him; and the sons of the prophets, themselves poor, had doubtless contributed their utmost. Yet all was not sufficient; and unless the whole sum were forthcoming, the inexorable creditor was fully determined to seize and detain her two sons as

bondservants for seven years; which, according to an Israelitish law, he had the power of doing. Imagine what must have been the distress of the unhappy mother, on receiving a threat to this effect. Her two sons appear to have been the principal earthly supports and comforts left to her; and to have them thus torn from her side was grievous indeed. How many nights had she probably spent in weeping upon her wretched couch, after receiving such an alarming threat! In truth, her situation appeared hopeless, and she must have sunk under her reiterated trials, had not the word of the Lord supported her, and the light of his countenance shined upon her in this hour of darkness. The dispensations of the Almighty even to his own children are not always joyous; he sometimes severely afflicts them, but his love is always sooner or later manifested thereby. Strange, forsaken, and disconsolate as may seem, at times, the condition of his children, he always accompanies them as their Shepherd and Guide, to whom it is an easy thing to make water flow from the flinty rock, and to call forth grapes upon the thorny brier. Such wonders, let it also be remembered, can only be performed in the wilderness of his people; and be it ever so dry and dreary, still "all things work together for good to them that love God."

03.17. The Widow's Care of the Prophet

The Widow’s Care of the Prophet But great must have been the distress and anguish of the widowed mother. Though the sons of the prophets had most probably interceded in her behalf, her creditor, who evidently hated the people of God, for he oppressed those who were quiet in the land, was only the more importunate. Deprived of every earthly hope, she was now driven back upon Him who is emphatically "the Judge of the widow, and the Father of the fatherless." But many a saint under the law could not approach the throne of grace with that "boldness and access with confidence" which the children of the new covenant enjoy by faith in Christ. "The way into the holiest was not then made manifest;" the veil was not taken away. Hence did many a dark cloud seem to intercept the prayers of Old Testament saints, arising from the consciousness they had of their own unworthiness. When the glory of the Divine majesty, before which the angels veil their faces, discovered to them their own vileness and deformity, they thought it presumption to importune the Almighty about their own insignificant concerns. What conflict and effort did it then cost the trembling petitioner, to penetrate even to the threshold of the sanctuary, while his heart sank within him at the first glance of the Most Holy! But we, brethren, are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, in the name of Him who became man for us. We can say, what no ancient Israelite could, Lord! thou hast been "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," having been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. We can exclaim, Abba, Father! hear us for the sake of Jesus, thy well-beloved Son, who is "not ashamed to call us brethren." We know that "we, who believe" in Him, "are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." With what delightful assurances does prayer ascend assisted by such reflections as these! How easily may we now soar above every cloud in the security of this consciousness; for it is our inestimable privilege to know the great work of reconciliation by blood, by the blood of God manifest in the flesh! But the Old Testament saints had recourse to the prophets, and employed them as mediators between the Almighty and themselves. Thus did this poor widow hasten to Elisha, as one having nearer access to the Lord than she had; and as one who, being endowed with Divine gifts and powers, would be able to counsel and help her. With tears and lamentations she appears before him, saying, "Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen." This it seems was all she could utter in her grief and distress. No request is made, but her desire is plainly enough intimated, in what she has expressed, and in her imploring looks. She was doubtless acquainted with the wonderful event that had not very long since taken place at Zarephath. Such histories, in seasons of calamity and want, tend surprisingly to sustain our wavering faith, and to strengthen our hearts. She might have reasoned, that if the widow of Zarephath obtained relief, why should she herself be forsaken; and that Elisha would surely not be less able to work similar deliverance in the name of his God, than Elijah, with whose mantle he was now invested.

03.18. The Widow's Miraculous Relief

The Widow’s Miraculous Relief The prophet, pitying at once this pious, but afflicted and widowed mother, finds himself at the same moment Divinely commissioned to wipe away her tears, and to cause her heart to sing for joy; and he said, "What shall I do for thee?" "Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" She answered, "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil." Then said Elisha, "Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full." And she went, and doubted not, but believed that a preservation similar to that of the widow at Zarephath would be hers. Here we may notice the use and design of such parts of sacred history as these: they are recorded for the purpose of supporting our own faith in God. With hurried steps the widow hastens home to comply with the directions of the prophet. She collects from her neighbors a great number of vessels for the purpose; she sets them all down in her room; she shuts herself in with her two beloved sons, and now—oh what a holy, solemn moment must it have been!—now in God’s name she takes her pot of oil; she broaches it; and begins to pour the precious liquid into the first vessel, which, perhaps, was ten times larger than her jar, but which, to her amazement, is already filled; and in the same manner she fills a second, and a third, and so on. The sons at removing one vessel were obliged continually to have another ready; and thus it continues to flow just as if a fountain of oil had existed in the jar. At length, all the vessels were filled, except the last which was under the jar, and which was already filling to the brim, when the mother said to her son, "Bring me yet a vessel!" and he said unto her, "There is not a vessel more." Then, the history says, "the oil stayed;" then it ceased to flow. Full of amazement, gratitude, and joy, she leaves her replenished vessels, and hurries back to the man of God, to relate to him, with a throbbing heart, the great and wonderful event that had taken place. Then Elisha said to her, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." Happy woman! How gloriously, as in an instant, was her heavy burden removed! She was redeemed from under the hand of the oppressor, and her children, those comforts of declining years, were not to be torn from her. It must have seemed to her as a blissful dream. But the manner in which her rescue and preservation had been accomplished would set the matter in its true light, namely, as an unequivocal declaration of Jehovah’s faithfulness and truth, as a pledge of his fatherly care and protection. It was proclaiming, not by words, but by deeds, "Fear not: I am with thee; the Father of the fatherless, and the Husband of the widow."

Thus are we again shown how wonderfully the Lord can relieve and sustain his people, and how all-sufficient is He after every human resource is expended. But it may be replied, that such extraordinary interpositions as these have ceased, and that God now never thus discharges the debts of his children. While we ought not to be over confident in asserting this, I would ask, is his help really the less marvellous because it is sent to us by ordinary means? Last Christmas-eve, a poor pious widow, who had several young children to care for, lay sick and helpless upon her bed. In all her neighbors’ dwellings, the families, young and old, were literally keeping holiday, while this

poor widow’s heart was oppressed with anxiety and grief. Her couch was watered with her tears; and her children, tending silent and sorrowful around her, had no morsel of bread, nor money to purchase it. Her thought was, "O Lord, how mysterious are thy ways!" and she sighed heavily. Then came Elisha’s question into her mind, "What hast thou in the house?" but her answer to herself immediately was, "What have I but a few empty plates and dishes?" This, however, was replied to by another thought immediately suggested to her, which was embodied also in Elisha’s words, "Go, borrow of thy neighbors empty vessels not a few!" This is not exaggerated; the thought came to her in these very words. But the widow sighed at any idea of applying it to herself. She turned it, however, into prayer, saying, "Lord, behold these my children; in them thou hast empty vessels, for they are without food and clothing!" And then her heart subsided in another thought suggested to her, "Be not afraid, only believe." In the self-same moment, the door of her cottage opened, a person entered, and with a friendly salutation, laid a present of money upon the table, and took his leave. Presently other persons came in, bringing bread and meat, and other sorts of food. The few plates and dishes were now all full, but still the supply was increasing, so that the children were obliged to run to their neighbors to borrow vessels, not a few, and none even which they borrowed remained empty. Supplies of linen were also brought, with clothing for the children, and even playthings as Christmas presents: but more delightful than all were the friendly countenances, and kind expressions of love and cheering consolation, with which the gifts were accompanied. I say, that all this happened in a few moments, in such rapid succession, that it appeared as if the persons had concerted together for the purpose; and yet not one of them was previously aware of the other’s intention. When all was again quiet, and the presents lay spread out upon the table, it appeared to the astonished widow as if the whole had been merely a pleasing dream. Then all that was within her exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place!" and her heart was melted with gratitude and emotion. She now recollected the dying saying of her husband, his last words, "Be still and weep not; the Lord will be with thee, He will not forsake thee!" "Surely," thought she, "it was the Lord that spoke to me by his lips!" And in the hope of soon meeting him in heaven, she seemed now, as it were, to possess him again; and that she could possess her health again, if it so pleased God. The latter idea had no sooner recurred to her mind, than she at once felt herself stronger and better than she had been for many years. She arose from her bed, praised the Lord with her little ones, and was able to attend public worship the next day, and the day following. After this she was obliged again to take to her bed, where she still remains; yet from that moment she has fully known, that it would be an easy thing for the Lord, whenever he pleased, as by the utterance of a word, to relieve her from all her afflictions. Now, tell me, is not this kind interposition, as well as the event recorded in our text, deserving of our notice? Let such a recent fact then have a place also in our memories, for seasons may arrive in which it will not be without its use. My brethren, there is a treasury "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It is a treasury of all possible good. If a blessing come not from thence upon our basket and store, our plowing and sowing will be in vain, and the sweat of our brow will avail us nothing. Without it, though we eat, yet, as the prophet Haggai saith, we have not enough; though we clothe ourselves, there is none warm; and though we earn wages, yet it is to put it into a bag with holes, Haggai 1:6. This treasury is the power, wisdom, and goodness of God our Savior, of whom the psalmist saith, "The eyes of all wait upon thee, O Lord, and thou givest them their meat in due season." He possesses the abundance of all things, who speaketh and it is done, who commandeth and it is created. He is clothed with honor and majesty. All power and dominion are

His in heaven and in earth. He governs and overrules all. Not a sparrow falls to the ground but with His permission, by whom "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." He leadeth forth the sun as a bridegroom out of his chamber; he appoints the stars in their courses, and calls them all by their names. He arrays every single lily with more than royal glory, and clothes the grass of the field; he gives to the young ravens their food; he crowneth the year with his goodness; he communes with the humble, and refreshes the weary soul. He is never at a loss, never without means. Every word of his blessing is full of benefits. To this all-sufficient, Almighty Father, as manifested to us in the person of Christ, we are directed to make known our every want. Through Christ are we reconciled to Him, and brought into communion with him. Yes; and thus we may apply to Him in every temporal want. Oh, had many among us only taken this course, they had not been now in their present perplexity! Had this been done by men in general, the misery of the earth had been unspeakably less. But then God is so awfully holy, and we are so awfully unholy. This is true. Nevertheless a way of access to him is open for the vilest sinner, and that way is Christ. He who cometh unto God by this way, with all his poverty, will in no wise be cast out. And then the true believer in Christ, however poor in this world, possesses all things. Take heed, therefore, that ye be true believers in Christ, and then will ye no longer discern, in the Majesty on high, a God afar off, but a God unspeakably near. Ye will no longer behold Him a consuming fire, but a tender Father to yourselves. Then ye will not shrink back, afraid to offer your petitions, but crying, Abba, Father! you will cast all your care upon Him. You will have no more hesitation; you will come boldly to the throne of grace, and find your wants supplied. Our Savior has said, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." If you should not find such promises as these fulfilled to you at once, yet proceed upon them as you are here directed; trust in them, and plead them before God. Forget not who it is that has said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." And again, "How much better are ye than the fowls!" Plead such Divine promises and assurances, and assistance and preservation will certainly be obtained, for heaven and earth shall pass away, but Christ’s words shall not pass away.

Chapter 68

03.19. The Shunammite: 2Ki_4:8-37

Chapter 6 The Shunammite

2 Kings 4:8-37 The way of life is the way of the cross; an afflicted, but yet a glorious way. Those who walk in it are never solitary. The Keeper of Israel, with a wakeful eye of fatherly love and faithfulness, ever attends them. Angels are commissioned to bear up their trembling steps. To them has it been promised, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." Their very tears are noted in the book of remembrance. Principalities and powers in heavenly places are interested about them; and at their departing hour, in whatever painful condition, they are surrounded by heavenly companions, ready to carry them to Abraham’s bosom, where the Lord is gone to prepare a place for them; so that, checkered as may be our course by sufferings and privations here, happy nevertheless are we, if we have the God of Jacob for our help, and our hope be in the Lord our God. All this will be seen strongly exemplified in the following portion of Elisha’s history.

"And it fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life. And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went, and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with

thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, 1 will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out." In this narrative five principal particulars may be noticed:

I. The lodging at Shunem;

II. The grateful guest;

III. The dying child;

IV. Gehazi with Elisha’s staff; and V. The raising from the dead.

03.20. Lodging at Shunem

Lodging at Shunem

About midway between north and south of the promised land, and a few days' journey from Jerusalem, there is an extensive plain, which reaches from the sea-coast to the vine-covered borders of Jordan, presenting here and there a hill, and partially watered by the river Kishon. In this tract, which for the fruitfulness of the soil, the luxuriance of its vegetation, and the pleasantness of its climate, was in former days scarcely equaled in the world, was situated, amid groves of evergreen olives and waving corn fields, the quiet little town of Shunem, inhabited chiefly by husbandmen, and a place of comfort and simplicity. Imagine yourselves looking down the street of it, and beholding a venerable person with one attendant, just come into the town as a traveller. A rough mantle is girded about his person; but his animated countenance is a striking contrast to his attire; for it is lighted up with benevolence and peace. Respectfully saluted by all who meet him, he returns their salutations with paternal kindness; and having advanced towards a house, rather distinguished from the rest by its superior situation and appearance, we find him received at the door by the mistress of a wealthy family, and who has welcomed him with unaffected cordiality. That the traveller should have been so well known in Shunem by young and old to be the prophet Elisha, attended by his servant Gehazi, need not surprise us. He had frequently passed through it on his visits to the seminaries of the prophets, which were stationed in various parts of the country; and whenever the tumult of the world urged him to his sequestered and peaceful retreat on the top of Carmel, he would sometimes have to pass through Shunem on his way. The inhabitant at whose house he was here welcomed, is described as "great" or wealthy, as she was the wife of a substantial Israelite. She was likewise no ordinary possessor of those true riches which neither moth nor rust can corrupt; for we may trust that she was a daughter of Abraham after the spirit, and one of those few in Israel who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. From the great respect and filial affection evinced in her conduct towards the prophet, we may suppose her to have regarded him as her spiritual father, though we are not informed how she became acquainted with him. But it appears that she was no stranger to him; that he had often availed himself of her hospitality, and that of late, with the approbation of her husband, who also feared God, she had prepared a room for his reception, provided with a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick. Elisha, gratified by their anxiety for his comfort, and well convinced of their sincerity, readily accepted this additional testimony of their kindness, and in his subsequent visits to Shunem, proceeded at once to the little sanctuary prepared for him, which his presence converted into a Bethel. Every care seems to have been taken, that the holy man should not be disturbed in his devotions and meditations; for it was perceived that he enjoyed a more wonderful and intimate intercourse with Jehovah than others. This example of the Shunammite pleasingly reminds us of the assurance given by our Lord, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise

lose his reward," Matthew 10:41-42. What else are we to understand by this declaration, but that whoever respects the Divine image in God's children, notwithstanding their humble and unpretending exterior, and whoever shows kindness and love to any one such person for the Lord's sake, shall participate in the same Divine blessings which he is ever pouring down upon the just? What say you to this assurance? Does not the Lord highly honor his children, by thus rewarding whatever good is done to them as if it were done unto himself? Does he not express a most tender care over them, in thus commending them to the kind reception of the world? Mark then well these words of the Most High. Whoever acts according to them, as did the Shunammite to Elisha, may be assured that the blessing of God will rest upon his house; and that blessing is likely to consist in the most glorious of all gifts, namely, spiritual regeneration, the first germ of which, perhaps, is indicated by such simple instances of love to the people of God. Or, if the person be already born again, his reward may consist in a gift, which, next to the new birth, is most of all to be desired, that of intimate communion with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, by a more thoroughly renovated and enlightened conscience. But whoever hates the righteous because they are righteous, let him consider what he has to expect from an Almighty Being who cares for his children with such a tenderness as this; yes, let the very love of Jesus to his people make such a person tremble.

03.21. The Grateful Guest

The Grateful Guest With Elisha, now returned again to Shunem, and under the hospitable roof of this pious family, time must have passed rapidly, and the hardships of his journeyings have been forgotten in such holy and blessed intercourse. How delightful is it, after having been exiled, as it were, amid the ungodly of this world, to find ourselves once more in the bosom of a Christian dwelling, where we may recreate our spirits, though but for a few hours, from the vain or vexatious conversation of those with whom business obliged us to intermingle, and where we can again hear the name of Jesus affectionately pronounced, together with the sweet and friendly salutations of God’s dear children! It is like landing after a long and stormy voyage, upon the hospitable coast of a pleasant island. In such meetings somewhat of that felicity is tasted, which will be enjoyed in the tabernacles above, in the great and blissful reunion which shall there take place. Oh, how painfully sensible do we thus become of the immeasurable gulf that exists between the people of the Lord, and the most refined and polished circles of the world! We perceive at once, that we have withdrawn from the atmosphere of selfishness, into that of love; from the element of deceit and dissimulation, into that of simplicity and truth. We breathe a different and a purer air, and feel with renewed freshness the comfort of belonging to that "little flock," which, like its good Shepherd, is "not of the world." In the middle ages, and in the very centre of papal domination, our own neighborhood of the Rhine presented a remarkable and cheering scene. For from Cologne to Mentz, and beyond Strasburg, there existed, under the denomination of "weavers," most of them being of that calling, a large number of true and enlightened Christians, who were obliged to keep themselves concealed to avoid popish persecution. These people were very united among themselves, so that they knew one another’s names, residence, and circumstances, often without personal acquaintance. In travelling they proceeded from one brother’s cottage to another, and thus found, wherever they went, a hospitable abode and home, as it were, in their own atmosphere; for it was unpolluted by the pestilential air of this world. Oh, that the same primitive intercourse subsisted everywhere among Christians of the present day! for great and manifold are the blessings belonging to such sacred communion. Elisha doubtless regarded it as a matter of gratitude to God, that having so repeatedly to pass through Shunem, he could find there a retreat such as this. The little apartment which had been prepared for him was exactly to his taste, nor would he have exchanged it for a royal residence. In his peaceful chamber, and in his secret prayers, we can easily suppose how fervently he commended these his kind friends to God. The next point in his history at this place is the concern he expressed to see these hospitable friends receive a prophet’s reward. He therefore "said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" The prophet having been in credit at court ever since the wonderful victory over the Moabites, his intercession would have been effective, both with Jehoram and his ministers. Those great men felt indebted to the prophet, but the prophet felt indebted to these private and humble servants of God. Gehazi is bidden to express the same to the Shunammite before Elisha, in his own as well as his master’s behalf, that no part of the

kindness thus acknowledged might appear to be overlooked. The Shunammite, however, feeling all the obligation to be on her own side, declines receiving any such acknowledgment, and considers the privilege of having such a servant of God as her guest, an abundant reward for the little trouble she had taken. Of the king, or the court, she had nothing to ask, as she lived on the most peaceable terms with her own people; feeling nothing of the oppression of those idolatrous times, and knowing nothing of disputes or litigations. Having said this, she seems to have withdrawn, while Elisha talked over the business with Gehazi. "What then is to be done for her?" said the prophet. And Gehazi answered, "Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old." Then Elisha, who, doubtless, had laid the matter before the Lord, and had now obtained his answer, desires the Shunammite to be called in again. And when Gehazi had called her, she stood in the door, as if kept back by modest diffidence about receiving any reward. He then addressed her with all the dignity and decision of a man commissioned of God, and said, "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." The astonished woman replied, "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid." The prophet having now taken his affectionate leave of the friendly abode, amid mutual blessings and prayers, let us pause for the sake of a reflection or two suggested by the Shunammite’s reply, "I dwell among mine own people." She said this with inward satisfaction. God be praised that we can make a similar declaration. Many think much of being regarded in the highest circles of worldly society; others, that they rank with the master spirits of the age, the men of genius and learning. We envy them not; but the condition of any Christian brother, residing among real Christians, would indeed be envied by us, if we could not enjoy the same condition. We have it, however, and thus we dwell among our own people. We have those about us with whom half a word is sufficient to place us upon the best understanding; nay, with whom words are hardly necessary for such a purpose. Blessed privilege of Christian communion, not to be purchased with the wealth of a world, and that exists only among sincere disciples. It is in Christian communion alone, that pure love, sincerity, and truth can ever prevail, and that the cup of social blessing cannot be embittered by the thought of separation. Let us learn in every way to express fervent gratitude for our own interest in it, and especially by always endeavoring to draw more closely those bonds of brotherhood, in which we are all united in spirit to Christ Jesus. But to return to the history, which informs us how the word of the Lord, as here spoken by Elisha, was fulfilled—"the woman bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life." Thus did she joyfully experience that the God of Sarah and of Hannah still lived, which she seems to have forgotten at the moment when she uttered her unbelieving remonstrance; "Nay, my lord, do not lie unto thine handmaid." And the God of Israel’s deliverance from Pharaoh, the God of Daniel’s deliverance from the lions, and the God of the deliverance from Babylon’s fiery furnace, still lives. He lives, and is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever." Were this more stedfastly believed and thought upon, we should see more of the glory of God.

03.22. The Dying Child

The Dying Child The history passes over an interval of a few years; after which we find the Shunammite’s child, who naturally had become the joy and hope of his parents, appointed to be the occasion of a most wonderful event in Elisha’s ministry. The happiness of this family at Shunem appears to have been hitherto uninterrupted, and perhaps they had begun to imagine that nothing more would obscure the sunshine of their days; when lo, the cloud of a frowning providence hangs over this happy abode. The father had gone out early into his fields to the reapers; and his dear child followed him soon afterwards, as it appears, to be with him, and to attend upon him. But while he was there "he said unto his father, My head, my head;" and the father, not suspecting danger, desired one of the young men to carry him home to his mother. Who can describe the shock sustained by the poor Shunammite, at seeing her beloved child thus brought home in a dying condition, for such it proved! "He sat on her knees till noon, and then died." Alas, for the poor afflicted mother! Her only child lies pale and stiff in her arms. He is dead; but can she yet believe it? Does she not call him by his name, and implore him again and again to look at her, but all in vain? The beautiful flower is faded, is dead; and the serenity of the happy family in Shunem is departed with it. But why hath the Lord done this? We presume not to pronounce on what particular account it pleased him to water these plants in Shunem with such a chilling dew. Perhaps He saw it necessary to convince them that the summit of happiness is not to be found on earth. Perhaps the child had robbed Him too often of their livelier affections, and these he would again reclaim. Or, they needed by some deep affliction to be more weaned from the world, to be more habitually sensible that their happiness every moment depended on the grace and mercy of God. One thing, at least, we know, that the affair was to terminate gloriously; that here they were to gather grapes from thorns; that a time was to come when they would kiss the hand that smote them, and would joyfully exclaim, Blessed be God, who hath led us after the counsel of his will, and not after our own! when they would be abashed that they had for a moment complained of a providence, in which only thoughts of love and peace prevailed. To those who love God, all things must necessarily work together for good.

03.23. Gehazi with Elisha's Staff

Gehazi with Elisha’s Staff But behold the broken-hearted mother with tottering steps, bearing her lifeless son into Elisha’s chamber! She lays him on the prophet’s bed, as if the child were only asleep. She once more gazes at him through her tears, and plaintively once more calls him by his name; but alas! a life to her so precious, is certainly fled, and she sees nothing but a corpse. Nevertheless she again presses his pale, clay-cold cheek with kisses, and bedews it with her tears. And now, having forced herself away from the chamber of death, and locked the door, she dispatched a message to her husband; to whom, however, the messenger was not to mention a word about the melancholy event, but only to request him to send her one of the young men, and one of the asses, that she might hasten to the man of God to Mount Carmel, and return immediately. Her husband complied, though surprised at her sudden determination; as it was then neither new moon nor the sabbath, at which times it may be supposed to have been the practice of Elisha to hold religious meetings in that retirement, apart from the idolatrous neighborhood. She left answer that it should be "well;" and as soon as the ass was saddled, she said to her servant, "Drive and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee." So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel, that his prayers might be put up for her at the throne of grace, if peradventure his intercessions might prevail to bring back her beloved child from the dead. The prophet seeing her from a distance, and apprehending that something was the matter, sent his servant Gehazi to meet her. "Run now," said he, "I pray thee to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well;" which she said either in confusion of mind, or; which is more probable, in very strong faith. See Hebrews 11:35. Thus she hurried on towards the man of God, and when she had come to him, to the hill, what a heart touching scene ensued! She prostrated herself before him, and held him by the feet, though Gehazi, presuming that such importunity could not but be offensive to his master, came near to thrust her away. "And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." Then, in a few abrupt words, which Elisha could well understand, and which seem to have been all that her suffocating grief could utter, she said, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" These two questions told her sad tale at once, and there was stirred up at the same moment, in Elisha’s heart, an ardent desire that God might soon comfort this brokenhearted mother by the restoration of her child from the dead. "Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them;" but being on so solemn an errand, he was forbidden to speak to, or answer, any one who might meet him on the way. Gehazi, having thus hastened forward, arrived at the house, and did as he was commanded. He laid the prophet’s staff upon the face of the little corpse, doubtless expecting, with the sorrowing domestics, that a miraculous effect would ensue; in other words, that the child would return to life. "But there was neither voice nor hearing." The dead awakes not; and the spectators look down embarrassed. Perhaps this was an instructive

lesson to Gehazi, and it may certainly be such to us. The staves of the men of God are powerless of themselves; and their energy consists in the virtue imparted to them by the prayer of faith in the Divine promises, through the mighty name of Jesus. How often have the very powers of hell fled before his weakest dependent servants! How often have mountains of difficulty been removed, and deep waters of affliction been divided, yea, the world itself been obliged to yield, through the prayers and exertions of faith! But, where there is nothing of this, it is only "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" Form is in itself but an unmeaning thing, to which faith alone can impart energy.

03.24. The Raising from the Dead

The Raising from the Dead

Elisha and the Shunammite were now at hand. The prophet had willingly accompanied her, and needed not her urgent entreaties. Compassion and kindness would not suffer him to remain behind. How naturally would the sight of this man of God attending her, compose her mind with the assurance that all would even yet have a happy termination! How joyfully then ought we to pursue our way, who have a greater than Elisha at our side, even Him, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Gehazi having hastily come away to meet his master, and having reported to him that the child was "not awaked," Elisha, followed by the mother, has now entered the melancholy dwelling. Her husband, we may well suppose, having, during her absence, returned home, had received them with a burst of sorrow. And we can hardly forbear adding that she, on the other hand, was almost prepared to comfort him with the assurance, that "the Lord their God would help them!" Elisha, however, caused the chamber of death to be opened. He entered it, as usual, alone; and requesting every one to leave him, he "shut the door on them twain," that is, upon himself and the corpse, and prayed unto Jehovah. And now let death and hell arm themselves for the conflict; for a greater than Gehazi is here; here is more than a staff of wood, and an empty form. Here is faith in the Almighty’s word and arm; a faith that can remove mountains with a word or breath of prayer. On Elisha’s first petition, the bands of death were not loosed. He then, doubtless by Divine direction, extended himself upon the body, and put his mouth upon the child’s mouth, and "his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm." He then rose up from it, and walked to and fro with lifted hands, and fervent prayers. Again he throws himself upon the body, embraces it as before, breathes the desire of his soul in faith and prayer, and lo, to the honor, not only of his prophetic mission, but of prayer itself, the prayer of faith,—he prevails. The gates of heaven fly open! Oh, the ecstasy of that moment! Signs of returning life appear; the child, sneezing seven times, opens his eyes, fixes them with a bright and steady gaze upon the prophet, and—lives. Elisha immediately calls Gehazi, and desires him to call the Shunammite. Almost breathless with joy, the happy mother rushes into the chamber, nothing doubting that she is summoned again to receive her darling. Neither have her hopes deceived her; for the prophet advances to meet her, holding the beloved child by the hand, in all the freshness of life and health, and says, "Take up thy son!" No sooner has the delighted mother beheld her son, than she throws herself at the prophet’s feet, and embraces his knees. Hallelujah after hallelujah rises from her innermost soul to the throne of Him who had done such great things for her. She has not only recovered her child; but its restoration would serve as a renewed pledge of Jehovah’s favor; a living monument of that Divine assurance, "Fear not, I am with thee." And she "took up her child, and went out:" whither, we may well imagine, though we may not follow her. The history here closes her "chamber" door upon her; but as we pass softly by it, we hear sobs within, as it appears, partly of joy, and partly of distress; with broken words,—words of supplication, of homage, and of grateful praise. Here then let us be

content to leave her; for surely she is prostrated with her child at the Lord's footstool, renewing the surrender of her heart to the God of her salvation, dedicating her child to him as an eternal possession; and casting all that she has before the foot of his throne. How sacred and impressive is such a moment of sacred retirement, into which further we cannot intrude! Let us, however rejoice, that the Lord has thus published his name so gloriously abroad in the earth, and that upon those that love him, and whose names are written in the book of life, his mercy endureth for ever.

03.25. Death in the Pot: 2Ki_4:33-41

Chapter 7 Death in the Pot

2 Kings 4:33-41 Who are those that shall never see death, and yet are dead? The apostle saith, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," Colossians 3:3. How wonderful to have thus outlived yourselves! The Scriptures often speak of those who belong to Christ as crucified, dead, and buried with Him! Turn your attention to Golgotha. What is it you behold there rolling on like a tempest against the Holy One of God? It advances on the wings of night, accompanied by a thousand terrors. The anger of the Almighty is in its train, the acclamations of hell accompany it. Unrestrained it rushes on, and its whole fury is directed against Him whom you see suspended on the cursed tree. No angel from heaven now stands forth to strengthen him, no shield from on high to screen him. He appears forsaken of God and man, and in this dreadful situation, he sees a power approaching him. It quenches the light of his eyes, it hath broken his heart, stiffened his limbs, and, amid the triumphant shouts of hell, rent his body and soul asunder. What power can this be? By what name is this fearful agony of the Eternal Son, this bloody catastrophe and dissolution to be described? It is the rebuke of God; it is death! It is a rebuke, a death, endured by Him who suffered it, not as due to himself, but to you and me. It is the death of that curse which was due to the sin of the whole world. He bore it as our Mediator; and "we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again;" which if we do, then are we indeed regarded as having died in Him, so that we shall never see real death, as he himself hath declared. Our death is thus complete, that we may now learn to regard our old man as crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we may not serve sin; that we may learn to reckon ourselves as dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord; that we may not suffer "sin to reign in our mortal body, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof:" that we may be able to join in the triumphant song, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" that we may see the king of terrors prostrated at our feet, and the horrors of death and of the grave crumbled to dust.

"And Elisha came again to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him: and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered thereof wild gourds his lap full, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage: for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat. And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot. And they could not eat thereof. But he said, Then bring meal. And he cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. And there was no harm in the pot."

Though the present portion of our sacred narrative may appear less attractive and significant than the one last considered, it illustrates the words of the apostle, that all Scripture given by inspiration of God, "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness;"

and it conveys truths and reflections which acquire a double interest from the times we live in. It shows what God is to his children in seasons of difficulty and distress: and do I err in supposing that such exhibitions are at present peculiarly adapted to our soul's wants? Let us then here notice, I. The dearth in the land;

II. Death familiar among the heirs of heaven; and III. The Lord's hand not shortened.

03.26. The Dearth in the Land

The Dearth in the Land

It is on the way to Gilgal, a city which we have before had occasion to notice, that the man of God is next observable. That town was situated in the vale of Jordan, not far from Jericho. Here, as has been mentioned already, there was a seminary of the prophets, in the middle of a population deeply sunk in idolatry, and it was from hence we attended the Tishbite to his triumphal coronation. Since our last visit, oh, how again does the land mourn! The beautiful country can hardly be recognized, so desolate is it now become. At that time, as far as the eye could reach, nothing but golden corn-fields waved around us; we were met in all directions by ponderous wagons, groaning under the rich treasures of the harvest, while the vines and pomegranates bent beneath the weight of their luxuriant burdens. The blessings of affluence and peace everywhere abounded, and in the pleasant fields and vineyards, the shouts and rejoicings of the reapers scarcely ceased by day or night. But behold now, how great a change! Blight has overspread the fields; the meadows are parched; the sickle rusts on the cottage wall, and a great part of the population are enduring the miseries of famine. All this appears the more strikingly to have been a visitation of Divine chastisement, because such calamities were rare in that most fruitful and blessed of all lands. Even the sons of the prophets, whom Elisha was visiting, shared largely in the general distress. The prophet, had he so pleased, might have remained at Shunem, where his wealthy friends would gladly have entertained him; and under their hospitable roof, he would have experienced little or nothing of the difficulties of the times; but no such considerations could influence him; his post was at Gilgal; both his duty and his heart bound him to the sons of the prophets. A good shepherd does not desert the fold when trouble comes; he rather finds a pleasure in sharing it with his flock, be it even unto death. Those only can evince such cheerful, undissembled constancy, who have the spirit of Him that said, "I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep." Oh may the love of this Shepherd, destroy in us that desolating abomination, selfishness!

Elisha arrives at Gilgal, and finds a gloom spread over his little community. Their stores, at no time superfluous, were now entirely consumed; their gardens were stripped, and their purses empty. They were indeed oppressed with want, and their wealthier idolatrous neighbors would be more inclined to ask, "Where is now thy God?" than to extend to them the hand of benevolence. They must have been dejected and distressed; and in what respect then, it may be asked, had they any advantage over the ungodly? Had they not to suffer the same want, and was not the same trouble allotted them? Yes, the children of God are often more afflictively dealt with than the children of the world; and relief is sometimes found sooner by the latter, than by the former. Where then, is the difference between those who love God, and those who are still alienated from him? Verily the difference notwithstanding is immeasurable; and one and the same calamity is quite different in the effects of its visitation upon the godly and upon the ungodly. While the latter often become by it

more hardened in their sins, the former are chastened and corrected by it, as by the hand of fatherly love. It obliges them to have more entire recourse to the Lord as their Shepherd; to obey and to trust in Him, of whom they felt not their need sufficiently in the day of their prosperity: and then, how great is the gain, to have thus experienced the blessedness of abiding entirely in Christ; to have the confession again and again wrung from us, that we are only worthy to be buffeted by the world, and that we are deprived of every refuge, but the free grace and mercy of God. Oh, how sweet are the fruits thus produced by sanctified affliction! Therefore it is not because we are "condemned with the world," but because we are beloved of the Father, that we are appointed to share in public calamities. With Elisha's arrival at Gilgal we behold, however, a reviving spectacle in the sons of the prophets gathered about him, as a father with his children. As such he converses with them, comforting and strengthening their hearts, and they eagerly listen to every word he utters, as their Divinely inspired instructor. How inwardly happy are they in his presence! He is a bright star of promise in the night of their affliction. The gloom of sorrow disperses before his words, and every eye again sparkles with joy. Yes, my friends, days of sorrow are not without much that is pleasing and sweet. They are cloudy indeed, and dark, but they resemble those lowering moist days, which unbind the frost, and make the waters flow. At such times the spikenard of the Divine promises sends forth its perfumes. Then do we first seriously listen to the voice of the venerable comforters of ancient times; and how beautiful do their feet then appear upon the mountains! Many sacred truths, which in more prosperous seasons we had but half learned, are now brought into use, and found invaluable. Our spirit thus can rejoice, while our outward man is depressed.

Elisha's presence and consolations having banished solicitude from the minds of his friends, his cheerful voice is heard desiring his servant to set on the great pot, and seethe pottage for the sons of the prophets. Then, as savory esculents were no longer easy to procure, one of the disciples went out into the field to see if he could discover some vegetable that might be eaten. But has God reserved any such thing for his servants in his vast domains? Surely he will provide, and show where the provision is to be found. Yes; the man comes home laden with a certain fruit, having the form of an egg; he has gathered his lap full. The fruit is shred into the boiling vessel of pottage; none suspecting that these gourds of the wild vine contained any harm. How strange! and yet God permitted it; yes, he permitted deadly poison to be ignorantly gathered, and mixed up as food for his servants! And why? Because his name is "Wonderful," as we have again occasion to acknowledge, when we here see the "end of the Lord," whose ways are goodness and truth.

Chapter 76

03.27. Death Familiar among the Heirs of Heaven

Death Familiar among the Heirs of Heaven The pottage is prepared, and brought to table, and the brethren, cheerfully, and without suspicion, sit down to their repast. And have they no warning from on high? None: the Lord permits them to begin their meal. But while eating the deadly mixture, they become sensible of its pernicious qualities. They rise from the table in anguish, and cry, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" It was indeed a heart-rending spectacle. They had seated themselves at their simple meal, so happy and joyful in God, so full of fervent gratitude for renewed supplies of food; thanking the Keeper of Israel for his bounty and faithfulness; and now, all at once, behold, death looks them in the face. What a dreadful change! What a sad interruption of their cheerful confidence and faith in Jehovah! It might well have shaken the strongest faith: though when the Lord afflicts his people in such mysterious ways, it is generally to draw forth from them Job’s sorrowing declaration: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." But it is sometimes to prepare an occasion for the triumphant display of his grace and willingness to save; and to open a channel for those tears of godly shame, which generally flow after seasons of distrust and discontent.

Here, then, we behold disciples of Elisha, and, for aught we know to the contrary, servants of God, indiscriminately exposed to a violent and sudden death. But we have here no discovery of strong faith, except in the prophet Elisha. We see only the common feelings of nature alarmed, and in dreadful commotion. How blessed then is it to be armed against any sudden invasion of the king of terrors! to have put on "the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand!" And do not the promises of God in Christ Jesus teach us, that the chambers of death itself are only chambers of repose, and thus show us death itself only as a friend? Our great Forerunner ascended visibly to heaven in his human form, that our hopes might have a sure foundation, leaving us the cheering assurance: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also!" It is not, therefore, against death that we have now need to arm; but it is against sin only, that comprehensive evil, which consists in slavery to the world, the flesh, and the devil. And we should be the more concerned about this, because death, which is always an awful thing to nature, becomes indeed awful, unless we are thus determined warriors against sin. Yield then to the Redeemer the most unlimited possession of your body and your soul. Our death is a call from God. No one dies by chance, but always at the moment appointed; neither sooner, nor later. Our days are all numbered. "Thou hast appointed" to man "his bounds that he cannot pass," Job 14:5. Real Christians, therefore, may well leave this matter with God. For no accident can befall them, till the Lord’s appointed time arrives. And when it arrives, it is to them as a Father’s messenger, calling them into his more immediate presence. Death is even numbered among the possessions of the children of God; so that the apostle writes, "Death is yours," 1 Corinthians 3:22. It is as Samson’s slain lion. When Jacob saw the wagons, which Joseph had sent to carry him to Goshen, "the fainting spirit of Jacob revived." This effect should be experienced by the true Christian, when he contemplates his last hour; for to him "the day of death," as Solomon speaks, "is better than the day of his birth," Ecclesiastes 7:1. It is the

ascension day of believers, the commencement of their happier life. To them "to live is Christ, and to die is gain," Php 1:21.

Ill then does it become our sons of the prophets to raise such a cry of terror. Dread of this kind should be reserved for other occasions, as, for instance, when a scheme of human wisdom would commend itself to us as independent of the atonement of the Son of God, and would point out a way to heaven in another direction than that of Golgotha; when a theology without Christ, without a priesthood and a sacrifice, would assume an evangelical disguise; or, with open front, and shameless audacity, would offer itself to our acceptance, either by books or from the pulpit; then we may well start back with horror, and cry, "There is death in the pot!"—for then, indeed, has poisoned food been placed before you, even wild gourds planted by the great destroyer of souls. He who is seduced to partake of these "dainties," eats and drinks in that death, against which there is no antidote. Alas! that even the pulpit as well as the press should have furnished such subtle and deadly poison, and in such abundance; but so it is; therefore take heed of their highly garnished productions. Alas! how many of our seminaries also provide nothing better for the nurture of the rising generation! Where in them is to be seen "the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" The peril which now threatened the sons of the prophets was undoubtedly great, and to all human apprehension desperate; and the danger to which their faith was exposed, was even greater than that which threatened their lives. For had they not implored the Divine blessing on their food? Had they not implored it in the company, and by the mouth of one of God’s most eminent prophets? We may be sure they had. What then were they now to think? Yet the Lord’s thoughts were not as their thoughts. His were "thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give them an expected end," Jeremiah 29:11. This appalling incident was only to commend to them his saving power and mercy. The greater the apparent difficulty, the greater and more glorious the deliverance. The prophet has received his instructions, and he knows that God will support him. If any one has cause to rejoice, it is Elisha. His embarrassment was not trifling, when the hilarity of their social meeting was so suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted by their alarming cry. Yet his anxiety, instead of repelling him from God, served to direct his thoughts immediately upwards. He poured out his alarmed spirit in fervent ejaculations to Him who was able to save from death, and an answer of peace was instantly returned, that the brethren should not die, but live. That they should live, not to be justified in their distrust of God, but to find reason with shame to lament it. God had yet work to be done by these prophets in Israel, and would not suffer their violent removal to become a triumph to Satan and his idolatrous adherents.

Elisha calls for a handful of meal. Who would have imagined that so unpromising an expedient should have conquered death, and deprived hell of its triumph? But the prophet prescribes it in the name of the Lord; and how potent will the most insignificant means become when thus employed! Then a cruse of salt is sufficient to remove from an entire district the horrors of a desolation that has prevailed for many years. Then a piece of wood can make the bitter waters of Marah sweet and wholesome. Then can the anointing with clay impart sight to the blind, and that of oil restore health to persons sick unto death. The healing power of every medicine depends upon the presence of one single ingredient, the blessing of God. If this be present, it matters not how insignificant are the means.

03.28. The Lord's Hand not Shortened

The Lord’s Hand not Shortened The children of the prophets did not stumble at the inadequacy of the remedy demanded by Elisha; they well knew that God often works by weak instruments. He who despises the day of small things, is not fit to build that temple of the Lord which began in humble majesty. The Lord of that temple was crowned with thorns, and sent forth fishermen and publicans to be the preachers of his kingdom. The meal was soon provided, and Elisha cast it into the pot without pomp or ceremony, in the fullest reliance upon Him who worketh alike by things great or small. He then says to his servant, "Pour out for the people, that they may eat;" and they hesitate not, but eat in faith. Faith is never put to shame. Those only are made ashamed who trust in their own strength; but faith shall see the glory of God. The disciples ate, and there was no harm in the pot. The pottage was savory and good, and the poison they had already swallowed was rendered perfectly innocuous. Thus a handful of meal, in the hand of the Almighty, sufficed to disarm death, to disappoint hell, to preserve the salt of the earth, and to sustain his church in the world. Let none be afraid, who have the God of Jacob for their help. He who hath "all power in heaven and in earth," and "worketh all in all," can render everything subservient to his pleasure.

Thus did the sons of the prophets at Gilgal experience what was afterwards expressly promised by our Lord to his immediate followers; "If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them," Mark 16:18 : a promise which was doubtless fulfilled. Spiritually also is it fulfilled every day to those who are living by faith in the Son of God. How many, alas! are poisoned to eternal death by a book, a system, or an error! but while the lusts of the flesh and of the mind are kept mortified through the Spirit, in the exercise of lively faith, such fascinations of the world have no power to inflame them. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Temptation is thus overcome, and made a subject of praise and thanksgiving to God. There is then no "death in the pot."

Oh! the blessed security of the children of God, against whom every deadly arrow is blunted, and every sword thrust aside! Whatever would hurt or destroy them, shall turn unto their salvation through prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The world is to them but as a refiner’s crucible. Even Satan’s power and devices are overruled by Him who is our Wonderful Counsellor. The decree is gone forth in behalf of the spiritual church, the faithful people of God, yea, in behalf of the very weakest of the flock: "All things are yours; whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours," 1 Corinthians 3:21-22. All things work together for their good. And shall those who are thus wonderfully protected, be anxious and perplexed? Shall they suffer their hearts to be oppressed by any care? Let them blush at such a thought. Is it not written, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye?" Zechariah 2:8. Away then with all vain fear; the fear of losing a little worldly convenience in the service of the "King of kings." Let no such things be once mentioned in the kingdom of grace; for the grace of that kingdom can render every deadly thing, except sin, healing and wholesome.

Chapter 78

03.29. The Man from Baal-Shalisha: 2Ki_4:42-44

Chapter 8 The Man from Baal-Shalisha

2 Kings 4:42-44

Martin Luther remarked to a person who called upon him with melancholy intelligence, "The gospel is good news, and is certainly true; but I know of little or no good news in the world besides." The first and chief announcement of it is the love of God; and it is cheering and consoling to observe the workings of this love among his children, as we shall now have an opportunity of perceiving. Its ways are, indeed, often wonderful, and shrouded in darkness; but let us remember the words of the prophet, "There shall be a covering over all that is glorious"—(German version of Isaiah 6:5).

"And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." As our history advances, the character of Elisha’s life and times exhibits more and more typically the features of the New Testament. The event now to be considered, forcibly reminds us of similar ones recorded by the evangelists; not that it equals those in grandeur, for it is in comparison but as a single stalk to the full sheaf: still, if we carefully and devoutly attend to it, we shall find much to reward and edify us. Let us notice, I. The man with the loaves;

II. Elisha’s command; and III. The confusion of Gehazi.

03.30. The Man with the Loaves

The Man with the Loaves The scene of these events is still in Gilgal, and among the sons of the prophets, whose difficulties were not yet at an end. Hitherto, indeed, had the Lord helped them, and gloriously supplied their wants from day to day. Though the morning might be often ushered in with sighs and weeping, the evening as often closed with gratitude and joy. Yet they, as children of God, neither had nor needed any better provision for the morrow, than what was secured to them by their faith in Him. Food was always supplied to them, as they wanted it; but, as they had often nothing in store, occasions for "taking thought" must have been common among them. At length, however, they were more impressively taught what hand it was that fed them, and that the Lord would provide.

They were now again in trouble. Their last morsel was consumed, and there were no signs of more; so that want began to stare them in the face. Did they turn away from it to the prophet? His calm appearance would indicate, that he is "not careful to answer" distrustful thoughts "in this matter." Was patience among them exhausted? did murmurings arise? Natural enough might it have been for one to sigh out, "Alas! when is this misery to cease?" and for another to exclaim, "We have escaped poison, only to die of hunger:" and for a third to look as if the bitter question were already upon his tongue, "Of what profit is it to trust in God?" How then would we, my brethren, undertake to allay discontent like this? Shall we accord with it, and say, in the same strain, "It is not worth our while to hope or trust in God? It is true, ‘he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;’ yet can he give bread also; or will he provide flesh for his people? ‘He feeds the young ravens when they cry;’ but from us, who possess his love, and to whom heaven with all its joys stands open, he withholds these common mercies, and we perish, we perish!" Shall we say this? Shall we doubt concerning Him by whom the hairs of our head are all numbered, whether our wants are known to Him, or whether he careth for us in temporal trials and difficulties? It would be well sometimes to put such questions as these to our discontented and needlessly anxious brethren, who though "of more value" to their heavenly Father "than many sparrows," can yet repine as though they had no confidence in Him. Is it not discontent and arrogance to expect the Lord to give us a stock in hand; instead of our being satisfied with present supplies, and trusting in him for tomorrow? "As thy day, so shall thy strength be," whether for life, or for death. What though here in Gilgal they seemed reduced to the last extremity? It was not really so, for the Lord can provide. A knock was soon heard at their door, and on its being opened, a countryman entered, bearing, as firstfruits, twenty small barley loaves, which he lays upon the table, together with a scrip of corn, which it was then the custom to parch and eat. The pious countryman had brought these presents to Jehovah’s prophet, probably because, according to the law, such first-fruits belonged to the Lord and to his priests; and the ten tribes being then no longer permitted to worship in the temple at Jerusalem, he believed that in thus bringing the firstfruits to Elisha, he had dedicated them to Jehovah. Thus were the sons of the prophets again taught not to distrust the love and faithfulness of God.

Events like this at Gilgal are not of rare occurrence in Zion. Many among us have received similar and even more surprising succors. So many anecdotes of the kind have been furnished from among ourselves, and been related from our pulpit, that I am almost afraid to add to them, for fear of their becoming common-place. Nevertheless I will venture to mention one more, which, though it contains nothing remarkably striking in itself, serves to show that the Lord is magnified even in small things. Last Christmas-eve a pious mechanic said to his apprentice, "Tomorrow is Christmas-day, and we have nothing in the house, and no money to get anything for dinner. The article we made for Mr. M—— is at the silversmith's to be mounted, and he I am afraid has been too busy to have finished it; and if it is not sent home today, the gentleman who has ordered it will give us scolding enough, but no money. Run, and see if it is ready." The boy did as he was directed, though his master thought it would be in vain to go. But before the boy came back, the pious master had shaken off his despondency, and was able to trust in God, fully assured that the Lord would provide in some way or other. No sooner had he thus thought, than the door was opened, and the gentleman who had ordered the article entered, and said, "Well, is it ready?" "Yes," replied the man, "though, I fear, not mounted; the boy is just gone to see." "Well," rejoins the customer, "if he brings it, send it me directly; if not, let me have it after the holidays; but I will pay you for it now." So saying, he threw down two dollars upon the table, and went away. He was hardly gone out of the house before the apprentice returned in great dejection, and with a sorrowful countenance said, "Master, we must go without victuals tomorrow, for the work is not finished." "That is unfortunate," replied the master; and then, taking up a paper with a cheerful countenance, he showed the astonished boy the money he had just received. "Master, where did that come from?" asked the boy. "Where," said the master, "should it come from, but from God who reigns above?" Then, relating to the boy what had happened, he exclaimed, "And does not our faithful God and Lord still live? Surely the Lord liveth, and he knows full well where poor Jacob lives." Yes, my friends; this happened last Christmas to that same poor Jacob, who, a fortnight ago, shook off the dust of this earth from his feet. I could relate many similar occurrences, all of which have taken place in our own parish; and one in particular, which happened within these few days. For was not that of the letter, last week, an extraordinary affair? The letter contained a dollar, with these words, "I know not how it is, but I am irresistibly impelled to send you this money. My own necessities are extreme, but I am not permitted to keep it. Take it then, since it must be so." And nothing could have been more opportune than was this dollar. But enough. There would be no end were we to relate the many similar instances with which we are acquainted.

"What part of Germany are you from?" said a celebrated professor lately to a young clergyman who had called upon him. He mentioned several places he had visited, and among the rest, Wupperthal. "Oh," said the professor, sarcastically interrupting him, "that is a place where fine marvellous stories are related!" Yes, we praise God that our valley is not so barren of facts related in these "marvellous stories," as is probably the experience of that professor; and these stories will one day surpass in importance the annals of the most renowned wars and victories; for what are they but fragments of the history of Jehovah's love and intercourse with his people, and so many additional proofs of his condescension, faithfulness, and power? The God, in whom we believe, is a living God; and we experience him to be such. There are many in the present day, who, because they like to live "without God in the world," think of him as only the Being who, having first set in motion innumerable worlds, now calmly contemplates their revolutions, but neither directs nor controls them. This is the most comfortless and absurd of all ideas. They indeed assign to heaven,

to nature, and to fate, their several imaginary parts, but God with them is imagined out of his own world. How infinitely more pleasant and cheering is the steady light reflected from the Scriptures, which directs us to a God of life and activity, a just God and a Savior, upholding all things by the word of his power! Not a lily breathes its perfume, that is not clothed by His hand; not a sparrow finds its food, that is not fed by "your heavenly Father." "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness." He not only created the sun and the stars, but daily leads them forth like a flock, and constantly preserves their never-dying fires; he causes the dew to descend upon the tender herb, and neither slumbers nor sleeps; he in due season whispers to the swallow and to the stork, "Arise, and go hence!" He controls every power, and him the whirlwinds and lightnings obey. He is the life of every living thing, without whose secret influence, bread would cease to nourish, water to refresh, medicines to heal, and by whose all-pervading Spirit it is that we breathe this vital air, that the blood flows warm in our veins, that the hand moves, and the mind retains its power of thought. Yes, the views afforded us by the Scriptures concerning the government of God are such, that we must necessarily conclude, were he for a moment to withdraw his superintending care, all things would return to their original confusion and emptiness, and the lamp of life would go out in darkness and nothingness. This account of the intimate connection between God and his creatures is the true one, for He has himself delivered it to us in his word. He is the life of all that lives, not less so of the worm in the dust, than of the seraph before his throne. All things exist by him from moment to moment; his kingdom ruleth over all. Yea, "the preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord." "A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps." Over the movements of our inmost soul he presides; "The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

There is nothing we do that is not under his control. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Laban, when panting for the life of Jacob, was in a moment disarmed of his rage, and constrained mildly to declare, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (Lutheran version, "otherwise than kindly"). Esau, burning with anger, laid wait for his brother, but when they met, he ran towards him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. Balaam was resolved upon cursing Israel, but when he opened his mouth for the purpose, lo, he was constrained to bless them altogether, and to predict Israel’s prosperity. Saul, when he at length found David, whom he considered as his mortal enemy, standing before him, instead of showing the fierceness of his revengeful jealousy, exhibited all the gentleness of the dove; and instead of denouncing death against him, he accosted him as a beloved son, "Is this thy voice, my son David?" and was far from offering him the smallest injury. Thus the Lord controls the most secret impulses of the human heart, and governs there, as everywhere, in the most unlimited sense, according to the counsel of his own will. How consoling is this truth! but it is only so to His faithful people. It is no comfort to the enemies of God, to be told that they are thus dependent on the power of the eternal Majesty. None but His children can find reason to rejoice, that Jehovah is the living God, for his providence is always working blessings for them; and indeed, what blessing is there that it does not include? In its bosom they repose, as watching over their existence, and directing their steps; and from the shadow of its protecting wings they can never for a moment remove. It is as a bounteous Provider, supplying their tables, and preserving them from hunger; whose honor is engaged not to suffer them to want "any good thing." Our

heavenly Father, by his beloved Son, requires all his children to cast their care upon Him, assuring them that though a mother may forget her sucking child, He will never forget them. He is their faithful and watchful Guardian; as "a wall of fire round about them," their "shield and exceeding great reward." All this we may well consider Him to be, who is almighty and omnipresent, who controls all the power of the enemy, whose voice "breaketh the cedars," and "divideth the flames of fire." He can impart a healing balm to every flower that adorns the path of life, and can extract the poison from every noxious weed. He is a Comforter, who is always present at the fittest moment, mixing with every pain the comfort of salvation. As an unwearied Friend, he is with them day and night, ruling over the present, and anticipating the future, arranging every thing as his love may deem most advantageous; skilfully administering to them pleasure and correction, and watching over them with a constancy and tenderness, infinitely surpassing all human love.

03.31. Elisha's Command

Elisha’s Command The man from Baal-shalisha must have been a most welcome visitor; not merely on account of the value of his gift, but because, as the firstfruits of a new harvest, it was a joyous intimation that Jehovah would again smile upon the afflicted land. His arrival in Gilgal with the bread, like that of Joshua and Caleb with the grapes of Eshcol in the Hebrew camp, and the dove with the olive branch in the ark of Noah, must have chased the gloom from their desponding minds, and opened the future to their view in bright and promising prospect. Thus in our days of spiritual dejection and barrenness, we breathe more freely, and indulge a more cheering hope, if we meet with a person whose life manifests a healthy, glowing, and joyous faith. The exalted piety of such a person affords us clear evidence, that heavenly grace is not withheld; we seem to recognize in it the first indication of a general pentecostal visitation; we indulge the hope, that our community may soon be the scene of a revival; the bare thought of which raises the very soul, and brightens the dim night of our earthly existence with a cheering dawn. As the miner, when he discovers, after much toil and labor in subterranean darkness, the smallest particle of gold, regards it as a favorable sign, so that his hopes are raised, and he joyfully exclaims, "This will no doubt lead to greater treasures;" so is it with us in the spiritual kingdom. The news of a single conversion among the heathen fills us with delight; for it serves to open to us the meaning of prophecy, and indicates, like a streak of early light, the nearer approach of morning. A single believing Jew, taking up the cross indeed, and addicting himself to the ministry of the saints, serves to give a more cheering aspect to his whole nation; and the new birth of such a person, is like a powerful breathing upon the thousand-stringed harp of the promises, awakening its tones to louder and livelier strains. As the twenty barley loaves lay upon the table, we may imagine with what complacency the younger members of the family would look, first upon them, and then upon the giver, as ready to embrace him, and give vent to the fulness of their thankful hearts. The elder ones, also, would be fain to acknowledge that it was long since such beautiful bread had been seen in Gilgal. It has been even supposed that such bread had never before been set before them. It is true, it was not from that table in the kingdom of God, at which men sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but to these sons of the prophets it would appear to resemble it much more than ordinary bread. The only alloy to their satisfaction was, that the loaves, being neither large nor very many, would soon be consumed. One or other of them may indeed have been disposed to think, "If God intends to relieve us, why not at once, rather than by halves?" Thus discontented and presumptuous, we are a people whom God can rarely please. We find nothing more difficult than to suspend our judgment till his purposes are ripened; for, if our desires are not instantly gratified to their full extent, we become distrustful of His power, goodness, and faithfulness. Were he to remove the veil from our eyes, and show us the gifts designed for us, how should we be abashed and ashamed of our want of faith, and of our low-thoughted cares and presumptions! As Elisha surveys the loaves, he would doubtless consider them as sent by the Lord, and as entrusted to his hand for the sustenance of his poor brethren. But will they suffice to relieve the cravings of more than a hundred persons? Undoubtedly they will, for the Entertainer is Almighty. It depends not on the quantity of the food; its nourishing quality consists on His blessing. We have not to learn the

power of the bread, but the power of Him who gives it and bestows it daily upon us. These we may easily conceive would be the thoughts of Elisha, which would encourage to further cheerful confidence in God. Entering, therefore, magnanimously into the spirit of their Divine Provider he commands his attendant to take up what is before him, and "give unto the people that they may eat." It was spoken in faith, purely in the name of God, and in God’s stead. This circumstance may remind us of the late pastor Henke, who once acted in a spirit similar to that of Elisha. It happened that a Christian friend called upon the worthy man, who at once invited him to stay and dine, though he knew that he had nothing to set before him. At noon the servant passed several times through the room, in order, if she could do it unobserved, to call her master out. The pastor, however, not perceiving her intention, only reminded her that it was time to lay the cloth. The servant went away embarrassed, but soon returned, and requested him to come out for a moment. "Sir," she said, with a sorrowful countenance, "you have desired me to lay the cloth for dinner, but you have forgotten, that there is scarcely a piece of bread in the house, and you have sent, as I heard you declare, your last farthing to a poor sick person." "Ah," replied Henke, smiling, "is that all you have to tell me? Lay the cloth just as usual; the dinner will be in time enough if it comes when we are seated at table." The servant, not a little astonished, did as she was desired. The pastor and his guest took their seats, and the good man, with a cheerful countenance, as at other times, offered up a prayer, in which he spoke much of "the fowls of the air," and "the young ravens." As he pronounced his "Amen," a ring at the bell was heard. The servant flew to the door, and what did she discover? A basket with handsome provisions, which a neighbor had been irresistibly prompted to send. With the utmost placidity, as if nothing extraordinary had happened, the pastor directed the whole to be arranged upon the table; then turning to the servant, he inquired, with a smile, if there was "any thing in the entertainment to find fault with?" These are delightful instances of trust in Providence, but we are not to ape them. It is easy to order the table to be prepared; but that of itself is not sufficient. Remember Gehazi with Elisha’s staff at Shunem. Yet have you Elisha’s or even Henke’s faith? Then hesitate not; for a royal Provider will supply you.

03.32. The Confusion of Gehazi

The Confusion of Gehazi

"Give unto the people, that they may eat," is Elisha's command to his servant; but Gehazi replies with a look that seems to say, Surely you cannot be in earnest. He counts their number—a hundred men, besides women and children, and all so hungry that these twenty loaves would scarcely satisfy ten of them. The servant, shaking his head, asks, "What! should I set this before an hundred persons!" And he utters his question with a tone and manner that seems to insinuate, that the prophet must be dreaming, or had issued an absurd command. He viewed the matter with carnal eyes, and attempted to gauge his master's thoughts by his own mean and groveling conceptions. His scruples remind us of a person, who should take up a cannon ball, try how far he can hurl it, and then gravely declare to an intelligent soldier, that it can never be thrown to a distance. For Gehazi had just in this manner forgotten what it was that gave energy and impulse to his master's command. That command was supported by a faith that could remove mountains; by such a reliance on the promises of God, as overcomes all difficulties. The energy of the Holy Spirit was in the order; yea, the power of the Almighty himself. How then could the people be otherwise than filled! But of all this Gehazi was too ignorant. He understood the command, "Give to the people, that they may eat," as if it were nothing more than what might have proceeded from his own lips. He did not consider that such words spoken by Elisha, were essentially different, because they had been spoken in the name and with dependence on the word of God, and therefore could do wonders. How presumptuous then were his unbelieving thoughts! It was his duty silently to obey and to distribute the bread; whether the people were to be filled or not was no affair of his; he was only required to perform the duties of a servant, but he acted as if the miracle depended on himself; and how often are we disposed to act in the same spirit! When our Lord sent forth his disciples, saying, "Go, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils;" how unbecoming would it have been for them to have replied, "Lord, our power and skill do not extend to such things." The commands of the Son of man were as good as promises; that is, what he desired them to do, he purposed to do by their means. In like manner, there is much enjoined us to do, which, were we to undertake it in our own strength, would come to nothing. We are commanded to overcome death, to tread spiritually upon serpents and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy, to resist the devil that he may flee from us, to lift up our heads in the greatest affliction, to rejoice evermore, never to be cast down, always to be holy, as our Father in heaven is holy; and many other wonderful works. How are these great and yet positive commands to be received? Surely they are to be received like those which were given to the apostles, when our Lord said, "Go, and heal the sick." For they are commands full of encouragement and promise; and if this thought only take possession of the whole man, we become animated with strength and courage, with peace and joy; for we can then lift up our heads, and triumph over death, and the world, and every foe.

Elisha, in no wise embarrassed by the remark of his unbelieving servant, repeated the command with increased emphasis, "Give to the people, that they may eat;" and he added, "For thus saith

the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof." And now, the servant having begun to distribute the bread as he was desired, beheld it multiplied in his hands. Every one partook of as much as he required: "they did all eat and were filled;" filled likewise, we trust, with gratitude to God. Yes, and there was still bread left in abundance upon the table. But it may be said, "This was out of the course of nature." Be it so: it is not more incomprehensible, than is the growth of the tree in the garden, or than that a single grain of wheat cast into the earth should return a hundred fold. The same almighty and creative power is displayed in the latter case, as in the former.

Let this miraculous transaction serve to strengthen our own faith, my brethren, as we trust it did that of the sons of the prophets. And you, in particular, who may be languishing under complicated wants and miseries, the end of which you cannot see; if the Lord be yours, "be careful for nothing;" for, as the Lord liveth, "he careth for you," and will relieve all your necessities. Fix your attention more than ever upon the great conclusion which you may obtain with infallible truth, from the still greater argument of the apostle; "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32. In this and in the following verses he breaks out into great rejoicing. His heart seems full, while he realizes, with one glance, all that is treasured up in Christ for the children of God: and at this view he appears to rise above the world and mortality. He beholds his enemies vanquished at his feet; he descries a righteousness of overwhelming brightness, and finds himself possessed of a fulness of gifts and blessings, the extent of which he is incapable of estimating; and under a protection so secure, that he seems to have nothing more to do upon the earth, except to triumph and give praise. Whence then does the apostle derive this superlative delight? Not from himself, but from a fountain that is daily and hourly open to ourselves. Christ is that fountain of blessings. All, all, is traceable to the love of God in Christ. Neither let us overlook that the apostle speaks not only of himself, but of every brother and sister in communion with him; and intimates, that if they cannot all break forth into the very same exultations with him, it must be ascribed not to any deficiency of their privileges, but to their want of faith. The first and last truth in which he exults is incomparably glorious and great. It is, "God is for us." In this truth we perceive the whole sum of the apostle’s privileges and power; here is his rock and his fortress. The Lord is on our side; He bears us on his heart; He graciously undertakes for us; He encompasses us with his love. This is, indeed, a truth in which we may well rejoice. But, can it be so? May sinful and helpless man really boast that God is on his side? The word of God here assures us, that he may; "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," attests it, and attests it irresistibly.

We are primarily and ultimately directed to the love of God in delivering up his only begotten Son, who was from eternity with the Father in heaven; "His best Beloved;" "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." How astonishing the fact of his having been sent to be the propitiation for our sins! Behold here, how eternal Love has triumphed! Behold the Son of God as an infant in the manger; veiled in our nature, divested of his glory; destitute, and exposed to a thousand dangers, unnoticed and unknown by the world; yea, an object of fiercest enmity and most barbarous persecution. Why was all this? It was because only at such a price could we be redeemed from merited condemnation. Yes, God for this purpose "delivered him up." The expression denotes a forsaking, a sacrificing. The same word is used, Matthew 10:21, where it is said, "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death:" and in this sense of death it is employed in the passage before us. And then, he delivered him up "for us all." "For us" means "in

our stead;" and thus our thoughts are at once transferred from the manger to the cross. Oh, what an affecting transfer! But the Scripture must be fulfilled; "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." The Man of gracious lips was permitted to exclaim, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" The Man who went about doing good, was nailed to the cross, and his compassionate soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." If we are sensibly affected while thinking on the sufferings of God's beloved Son; what must we think of the love of God towards us in thus not sparing him, but delivering him up in our stead! For he did deliver him up. Oh, unfathomable love! Oh, unutterable mercy! The apostle, having thus set before us the love of God, draws from it wonderful, delightful, and incontrovertible inferences, under which we may reduce every anxious care, and out of which we may form another Eden in this vale of tears. His first and grand inference is, "How shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" Admirable is this inference, and beyond all contradiction. The truth of it is certain, and plain even to a child. Was his love to me such, that he gave his own Son to suffer death upon the cross for me? then he certainly will not refuse me inferior blessings. For all things in heaven and earth are as nothing compared with this unspeakable gift. How inconsistent is it to doubt the goodness of God as to the supply of our daily wants! Ye seem thus to say, "God has indeed given me his Son, so far, I admit, his love extends; but it is not so evident that He will give me clothing, food, and shelter." How absurd and blind are such reflections! What! shall the grace that confers upon you its crown, and heaven itself, fail to supply all your wants upon your pilgrimage? It is with reluctance I enter upon the refutation of such unreasonable thoughts, lest, by so doing, I should awaken a suspicion that they rest on some foundation. O be wise, my brethren, and consider how infinite that love must be, which places underneath you its everlasting arms. And, whenever doubts and fears arise, flee to Bethlehem, behold the young Child lying in the manger, contemplate the brightness of the love which there shines upon you, and ask yourself the question propounded by the apostle, "He that, for our sakes, spared not his own Son, how"—answer, ye angels; ye men and devils, join all your sagacity, and say—"how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The apostle draws another inference from the love of God. It is, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." The inference here is likewise sound and unquestionable. Such was the love of God to us, that He gave his Son for us under the law, that he might fulfill it; under the curse, that he might sustain it. And the Son of God has actually fulfilled for us the law, and endured for us the curse. If, therefore, we believe in Jesus Christ, with the heart, unto righteousness, God will judge us according to the merits of his Son: and then, unto the last breath we breathe out of heaven, nothing, be it what it may, can deprive us of the right thus exultingly to inquire, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" Yes, who shall accuse them? Shall Satan? he is "cast out." Shall the angels? here is a righteousness that will eclipse their own. Shall our fellow men? We should be sorry to find them at the last day our accusers; but they would; he found liars. Shall conscience? it is become "the answer of a good conscience towards God." The Supreme Judge has already pronounced us justified by a faith which worketh by love: and "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "It is God that justifieth." The apostle draws another inference. If, he argues, God be for us; if he spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, "Who can be against us?" How evident is this inference also, and how incontrovertible! As he pronounces the word, "Who," he looks all around, as though he would address the inquiry to heaven, earth, and hell. The most appalling objects may present themselves to his view, but at these alarming

objects he is neither to despond nor to be made weak. He exclaims, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Seeing, then, that for us also God hath given his only begotten Son, what shall prevent us from breaking forth into the same spiritual joy? Let us but be conquered by the same love that conquered Paul, and our place of defence is as "the munitions of rocks." We are then in a citadel, whose walls are fire; whose gates are decorated with the spoils of a thousand vanquished foes; and whose foundations are in the holy hills. The saints in this security are proof against all assaults. Here the weakest shall be as David, who, amid all the assaults of his enemies, lived in it uninjured, and then closed his mortal life, as he did his Psalms, with triumphant halleluiahs! In such a strong-hold does every true believer dwell. The love of God in Christ is their defence, and forms, with all the other Divine perfections, an insuperable barrier around them. Here we may be alarmed, but not conquered; attacked, but not overcome. "We are kept," saith the apostle, "by the power of God through faith unto salvation," and if so then "God is for us, and who can be against us?" In the strength of these three important inferences let us earn to hold on our way in holy fear, and consistent obedience. Are we disquieted about our temporal existence, let us, for a moment, thoughtfully retire, and quell the tumult of our hearts with this Divine suggestion: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Does a sense of sin, of sin constantly repented of and struggled against, depress us? Let us call to mind the infinite love of God. He has delivered up his own Son for us. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth." Does fear lay hold upon us at the sight of the many enemies and difficulties we have to contend with? Let us recollect that God has given us, in His precious promises, sufficient warrant to exclaim with exultation, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Hallelujah! Amen.

03.33. Naaman: 2Ki_5:1-2

Chapter 9 Naaman

2 Kings 5:1-2

Anxiety, as to "what shall be on the morrow," occasions more than half the troubles of life. Visit any abode of affliction, among the poor or the rich, and you will find that its distresses arise oftener from anticipations of the future, than from the exigencies of the moment. Hence the prevalent custom, in all ages and nations, of seeking for tokens of security from misfortune. Hence the almost universal recourse to astrology, oracles, priest craft, false visions and dreams, and even to birds, whose settlement upon the housetop has been imagined as valuable a prognostication as was the arrival of Noah’s dove.

Signs of this sort are of little account. Nevertheless, one sign there is, which is infallible; and they to whom it belongs may well rejoice at it, and may learn to cast every anxious care away. What can this be? Is it wealth? Far from it! Remember the man described in the gospel, who pulled down his barns and built greater. Is it honor and fame? These quickly fade like a green bay-tree. Is it talent and learning? These cannot avert distress, or death, or the wrath of God. Is it political distinction? He who poureth contempt upon the great ones of the earth that honor him not, is able also to destroy both soul and body in hell. Is it our own supposed rectitude? That will prove a miserable covering, when tried by the measure of the righteousness of God. Is it even Christian knowledge? Judas Iscariot possessed this, when swift destruction came upon him. The true token of happiness is different from all these, and is referred to Psalms 86:17, "Show me a token for good." It is not an exterior, but an interior sign; yet it always shines forth in the life and conversation of the outward man. It is natural to none, for it is a wound inflicted on the heart by the grace of the King, and is the invariable result of self-knowledge. No herb, no balm produced from this earth can heal it. The publican exhibited it, when he smote upon his breast; and the thief upon the cross, when he cried, "Lord, remember me;" and the woman that was a sinner, when she washed the Savior’s feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. All, with whom it has been well in time and in eternity, have had this infallible mark, which, in other words, is a heart truly broken up and humbled by the deep consciousness of sin. Those who have it feel self-condemned, and themselves deserving the curse of a righteous God. This constitutes the wound. Of a truth it is an unsightly token, but it is of inestimable value; and though but little esteemed by the world, it is the only prognostic of true happiness. To this the Scriptures testify. But it stands not alone; it is associated with another, namely, with the mark with which the Lord distinguishes his people for their preservation. That mark is the determination not to know any thing in comparison of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Where these are found together, the wound and the mark, conviction of sin and faith in the Lamb, the contrite heart and reliance on the only Sacrifice, there the good sign is complete, and only there. It dazzles not like this world’s honors, like the golden chain, the star of nobility, or the badge of royalty; but how gloriously shall the splendor of this sign one day outshine all these! In the world it confers neither dignity nor rank; but

the angels of God behold it with joy, and love those who possess it, knowing themselves appointed to be their ministering servants. God be thanked, that there are every where among us some whose hearts bear this token, compassed as they may be with many infirmities. That delightful part of the narrative of Elisha’s history on which we are about to enter, is a practical commentary on David’s words, "Show me a token for good." God grant his blessing to our meditations!

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife."

Events of Elisha’s life now come before us which still more strikingly bear a New Testament character. Here the breaking down of the partition wall between Israel and the heathen is anticipated, and several other things of an evangelical description. By way of introduction to what this part of the narrative has to offer, we shall consider, at present, the new personages here presented to us—

I. Naaman the Syrian;

II. That humble instrument for his salvation, the little Israelitish maiden: and we pray that, under the Divine blessing, this alone may serve not only to gratify, but to benefit us.

03.34. Naaman the Syrian

Naaman the Syrian The history turns our attention to Damascus, an ancient city, the capital and residence of the monarchs of Syria, situated in a fertile region north-westward of Hermon and Lebanon. Let us leave the boundaries of the Holy Land to contemplate for a while the death-like shades of that heathen country. Thick darkness surrounds us. On every side the altars of idolatry are multiplied. Not the faintest ray of pure light, of the knowledge of the true God, relieves the awful gloom that covers this benighted people.

We might almost imagine them separated from the land of Divine revelation, of seers and prophets, by oceans or immeasurable deserts, instead of that mere ridge of mountains which divides Syria from Canaan. But a more formidable and impassable barrier was their national hatred against the laws and customs of Israel, their ancient and hereditary enemy. The pride of these heathens caused them to shut their eyes to the light of Judah, and to extinguish on their very frontiers any spark of heavenly wisdom that would have passed to them from thence. Yet the Almighty graciously designed to cast the torch of his truth into the very heart of this fenced country, and to establish beside the altars of their dumb idols, a new altar, to the glory of his name, Jehovah. Wherever he hath purposed to enlighten, who shall disannul it? His command, "Let there be light," scatters the thickest darkness. His grace and power, and his omnipotence, go forth together, and who shall withstand them?

God is not a God in heaven only, he is also a God among men, and will be known as such: he will be recognized as a God, who resides and governs in the middle of us; and, great in the smallest things, his guiding hand directs the most minute affairs. For this reason his works of grace proceed commonly through the intervention of human means; and he conceals his own sovereign control under the concurrence of a variety of apparently accidental and trivial circumstances. Nevertheless, he shows by the event, that all was Divinely arranged; and thus displays to us not only his work, but Himself as the all-governing, omnipotent, omnipresent Jehovah. These remarks will be confirmed by the present history. On the throne of Syria was seated the warlike Benhadad, the same who, in the lifetime of Elijah, had led the battle against Israel, and who commanded in person on the bloody field, where Ahab, whom God had rejected, fell, transfixed by an adventured arrow. Among the assemblage of grandees whom that mighty heathen prince had gathered about his person, there was one particular favorite, whose talents had raised him to the right hand of his king, and the renown of whose deeds had made him the idol of the people. His name was not less descriptive of his person, than of his official relations. He was called Naaman, which signifies well-formed, beautiful; a designation which afterwards indeed became a reproachful contrast to his figure and appearance. At present he was arrayed in the doubtful and perishable glory of earthly greatness; his brow was decorated with laurels gained upon the battle field; his breast glittering with the insignia of royal munificence and favor. The public voice proclaimed him the greatest commander of his age, and his acts were probably celebrated in popular songs. For the rest, Naaman was a heathen, born and educated in all the idolatrous blindness of his people: he had often, indeed, been providentially conducted into the land of Divine revelation, but had remained

insensible to its light. Hitherto he had only visited this people, from whom his healing and salvation were to proceed, in the hostile attitude of a warrior; like too many in our day, who can tolerate and delight in any but those who, having access to the tree of life, and possessing the true riches, are the only people that can render them the services they stand in need of. Happy is it for us, that "it is God who worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure;" that the will itself is vouchsafed of God as an earnest of its accomplishment. Happy is it for us, that the grace of conversion not merely solicits and invites, but that it operates with Divine energy, both seeking and making its subjects. Who would be saved were it otherwise? Naaman, likewise, was to experience this gracious power. That God, of whom he was at present ignorant, had great designs concerning him, however unfavorable appearances might be, and however conflicting the elements that opposed. The Lord governs in the human mind with the same almighty sway as in the kingdom of nature. He not only calls forth the stars in the canopy of heaven, but the very thoughts of our souls, and can bid them come and go at his pleasure. All hearts are in his hand. Obedient to his will the vast universe holds on its course; and man, the child of dust, with every insect and atom, are under his control. Such a connection banishes, indeed, the proud idea of national and individual independence; yet renunciation of all self-sufficiency in the creature tends but to our greater tranquillity. The only thought that can enable us to take a cheering survey of the world and its affairs, is that all things are sustained and guided by the hand of almighty power and infinite wisdom. What would become of the world, if its affairs were ordered by the will of man, and not by the will of God! At the period at which we next behold Naaman, a dark cloud had obscured his glory. Although he was the same distinguished hero as before, he was no longer an object of envy. Alas! the bitterness of gall had been infused into his cup of joy, his glory was corroded by a canker, which in an instant had brought down this man of prosperity and grandeur to a level with the most pitiable of the sons of men. Naaman was now become a leper! He was afflicted with that dreadful and disgusting disease which was employed to represent to Israel the most abominable thing under heaven—sin, and the healing of which was typical of salvation in Christ, the greatest of all blessings. His body, from the crown of his head to the soul of his foot, was one entire ulcer; his skin a lacerated, suppurating, inflamed sore. His comeliness was changed to disgust and horror, and his breath into that of deadly pestilence. Such was now the situation of a man, who so lately had been raised to the pinnacle of glory and earthly felicity. Who is there, however mean and wretched, that would exchange situations with Naaman?

How often we are inclined to think, "Such a one is reposing in the lap of prosperity; what a rich, what a great man is he!" But did we only know the misery that is often concealed beneath such splendor; we should be far from envying men their earthly distinctions. Be contented then with your temporal condition, however unpromising it may appear; a glittering exterior can add nothing to your happiness. Cease to covet any thing allotted to others. It is the peace of God alone that can impart real happiness; and to him who possesses this, a plain morsel of bread is sweet, and a cottage is as happy an abode as a palace.

03.35. The Little Israelitish Maiden

The Little Israelitish Maiden

We may easily suppose, that for the recovery of so important a man as Naaman, no efforts were left untried. The king, who had found him the most powerful supporter of his throne, would certainly command his most skilful physicians to attend him, and they no doubt would zealously use every means in their power for his relief. But no means proved successful for the relief of Naaman. The mysterious and inveterate disease of leprosy appears never to have yielded to medical treatment. Accordingly the Scriptures represent it as a plague, which, having been inflicted by the immediate hand of God, could only be removed by his immediate interposition. Diseases of the kind are not uncommon; and they serve to check the pride of man, not only by rebuking for sin, but also by circumscribing human science and wisdom within the limits of a becoming humility. For they serve to keep alive our consciousness of entire dependence on the Almighty, and to guard us against the erroneous idea, that the preservation of our lives is in our own hands. What a signal discomfiture has the science of this world lately sustained, in its conflicts with that devastating pestilence, which, issuing from the east, overspread a great portion of the world; and which still continues its ravages! As Christians we cannot but acknowledge this as a timely and salutary rebuke to the growing pride of human intellect; for, in truth, its boastings had attained a height that knew no bounds. Science, which, in its inflated pride, had usurped the throne of the Godhead, has been obliged to confess, by the mouth of its most distinguished representatives, that it is unable to detect and eradicate this disease; and human art, which had arrogantly professed to do all things, and assumed the lofty air of a worker of miracles, has here sustained a signal defeat.

We have now to consider how the afflictive visitation upon Naaman was likewise sent in goodness and mercy. God was gracious to this heathen captain. But was it because Naaman first loved God? Certainly not. It was because God would herein display his goodness and mercy. Naaman had evidently lived after the flesh, and had sought his own glory in valour and war. But God delighteth not in the strength of the battle, neither taketh pleasure in the prowess of sinful and mortal man. The only account therefore that we can give of his favour to Naaman is, that "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy." But how shall such mercy be brought near to him? What way of approach is there to the man who has not the faintest conception of the living God, is ignorant of His word, and spell-bound in the mazes of his erroneous and superstitious faith? Fear not, for with God all things are possible. Who would have expected that the leprosy should have been appointed as the first link in that chain of events by which such a display of Divine mercy was to be effected? The second link is one which we should be still less likely to have thought of. During the continuance of the war between Benhadad and the king of Israel, the Syrians had invaded the Israelitish borders in marauding companies, and had carried away (probably from some village) a little captive maiden, who appears to have been thus utterly separated from her parents; and, having been made a slave, was providentially brought into Naaman’s family, and waited on Naaman’s wife.

Here a mysterious hardship seemed to have been permitted by the "Keeper of Israel;" but we are sure to err, when we form a judgment on the ways of God, without waiting to see the end of his providence. This event, which appeared to originate in the mere will of man, and to be the result of discord and confusion, was the commencement of a plan, which, through the wise dispensation of God, was to command the admiration of future ages. For it turned out to be only an additional illustration of the fact, that precisely when God's care of his people is thought to have come to an end, it unexpectedly receives a new and glorious confirmation. For yet a little while, and you will perceive how admirably this mysterious dispensation will unfold itself in the recovery of Naaman, and, for aught we know to the contrary, in the salvation of his soul and of the souls of many. Certainly such mercies of God are never displayed entirely in vain. Yes, the development of this mysterious event will be such, as to give sufficient cause to the little maid, whose fate now appears so deplorable, to cast herself adoringly before the Eternal, and to kiss the hand that withheld its succour in the hour of her captivity; to call forth from the afflicted Naaman the grateful acknowledgment, that, in this child, a kind angel had been sent to Damascus for his relief; and to extort from the whole city the confession, that "The Lord he is God, and none else." So that we likewise must be filled with admiration, and be constrained to confess, with lively and renewed conviction, that we have abundant reason calmly to repose in the government of the Most High, whose counsels, though mysterious in working, are glorious in their final accomplishment.

Blessed is he whose God is the Lord, and who possesses the assurance that the events of his life are ordered by unerring wisdom and goodness. Such a person may assuredly reckon that when things seem most dark and inexplicable, the Lord of all will sooner or later certainly appear for him. For the words of the psalmist are everlastingly true, that "Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies," Psalms 25:8-10.

03.36. The Little Maid from a Foreign Land: 2Ki_5:3

Chapter 10 The Little Maid from a Foreign Land

2 Kings 5:3 The Lord, whether he seem to have forsaken us, or to have arrested us with a feeling of his displeasure, has doubtless in each case the design either of leading us to repentance, or of confirming us in it. He would divest us more and more of self; he would make us more thoroughly sensible of our entire dependence on Him, and on his grace. Like considerations may serve not only to reconcile us to many of his mysterious dealings with ourselves and others, but even to make us gratefully admire and adore the wisdom and goodness which he displays therein. Our present subject happily tends to the same result.

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Our thoughts tarry with growing interest at Damascus, on account of Naaman, whom Providence had now so specially taken by the hand. No sooner do we witness, with painful sympathy, the decay and expiration of all his worldly glory, than another of infinitely greater brightness appears to dawn. And how remarkable was the commencement of this mercy! Bands of the Syrian army had made incursions upon the Israelitish frontiers, had attacked and plundered some unprotected place, and had carried off a little Jewish maiden, probably to sell her in Syria as a slave. Who would have imagined that such a scene of calamity was the introduction to a process of Divine mercy towards Naaman and his country? In what degree it was such will presently appear.

03.37. Sold at Market

Sold at Market

We may first turn our attention to a heathen marketplace, that of Damascus, where it is very possible that our little maid was exposed for sale. But be that as it may; whether with a multitude of other unhappy people, violently torn from their homes, and driven like cattle to the market, this child was also appraised and sold, or whether she was handed over at once as a present to Naaman’s wife, of two other things we cannot well doubt, namely, that she must have suffered extreme anguish, and that the particular providence of God was in this event. There must have been a time, when her young heart was well nigh broken, when she thought upon her father and her mother, and her distant and beloved home. She falls, however, into the hands of Naaman’s wife; and how, but by the providence of Him who called the universe into being? This child proves to her mistress as a messenger from heaven; and not to her mistress only, but to Naaman: and hereby events transpire which were to interest his household, and his prince, and the Syrian nation, and king Jehoram, and all Israel; yes, and ourselves also. Such Divine disposals, beginning often in sorrowful events, and often in little things, it behooves us seriously to consider. What is here presented to us may serve to shed a light on what is dark in our own experience, and may furnish us with the reason why the Almighty, instead of granting directly the blessings we may have implored, and the assistance we may have earnestly desired, has appeared to shut up our path, and to appoint to us sorrow upon sorrow.

03.38. The Disease

The Disease The captain of the host of Syria sits in his chamber, oppressed and dejected by an incurable disease, and thinks of any thing but recovery, or of its probability, or of its means so near at hand. But now, in another part of his mansion there resides a little captive Israelitish maiden, employed in "waiting upon Naaman’s wife." Were we to be banished for a time, like this Hebrew maiden, to the privations of a foreign land, and condemned, as are many of our distant brethren and sisters, to stand isolated in our faith, in the middle of a cold, unbelieving, benighted world, oh, how would those privileges rise in our estimation, to the enjoyment of which long possession has almost rendered us indifferent! While not a few are ready to envy us the pleasant opportunities of brotherly communion that have really befallen us, and are thinking that our spiritual profession must be ever fresh and green, amid the streams of refreshment and encouragement which surround us, alas! what is our interior condition! Oh that we did not ourselves so frequently trouble a spring from which we might draw such abundant supplies of spiritual profit and delight! Did we love one another better, my brethren; were we more firmly united, more unanimous and mutually intimate; were we more confidential with each other, more unreserved and open, than we too generally are, how unspeakably should we gain in substantial joy and blessing! I beseech you, if you value these things at all, think oftener of the apostle’s words; "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves."

Whether the little Hebrew maiden was particularly well-informed and instructed we know not; but she brought with her sufficient light to cheer the dark and dreary path of the disconsolate. It must, at least, have been known to her, that God was not only the God of the Jews, but also of the whole earth. She could not, therefore, have doubted, that if Naaman humbled himself before Jehovah, he might experience that Divine favor was not limited to the borders of Canaan; hence she said, "Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy;" and who can say to what other and greater blessings? The wish of this child was uttered in perfect simplicity, and evidently without the remotest suspicion of the great results it was to originate. But the information was instantly communicated to Naaman himself. And how much had that little, lowly daughter of Abraham already accomplished by her pathetic exclamation! In a moment did she thus revive the hopes of the afflicted pair, and introduce into this house of heathen gloom the first ray of cheerfulness. Those who had so lately contemplated death, and who had only dreamed of separation and the grave, are now suddenly awaked to anticipations of prolonged life and future felicity.

We also may remember a similar and more delightful period in our own lives, when a ray of gospel truth first cheered our minds, after we had gone on restless and dejected under a sense of our estrangement from God; the words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," or some other such cheering invitation; having first made known to us One that could help us, and One alone. And have we been deceived or disappointed? Blessed is he who

has found himself where the footsteps of Jesus are heard, and where all may obtain counsel, consolation, and relief. O go unto him all ye that stand as it were far off from him! Let those who desire the healing of their souls immediately have recourse to Christ. He, and He alone, can effectually recover us from the leprosy of sin. In him, and in him alone, is our peace, security, and life. In him, as in a living temple, dwelleth the all-sufficiency of the Godhead bodily. What though it be awfully proclaimed from this mystical temple, "Whoever forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple!" let us but enter; and within we shall read the words, "Here is peace; here the weary find rest and refreshment:" and from a thousand pillars, that stand as firmly as the everlasting hills, do those indelible truths shine forth; "I am thy God: I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and all that I have is thine." Amen.

Chapter 88

03.39. The Journey to Samaria: 2Ki_5:4-7

Chapter 11 The Journey to Samaria

2 Kings 5:4-7

How unspeakably consoling are those words of our blessed Lord, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost!" Luke 19:10. He here represents man as a sheep wandering without a shepherd in the solitude of a waste and howling wilderness, which, finding nowhere a hospitable shelter, is exposed, weak and defenseless, to the ravenous wolves, and ignorantly pursues the path of death. Or, we are reminded of a ship foundered in the mighty billows, and "lost" to all hope of recovery: or of a person who has borrowed a large sum of money, and who, when the time for repayment arrives, has not a farthing left, and is obliged to part with his house and all that he hath; his comfort, his credit, his strength, and, perhaps, his life. Examine yourselves, and see if your own spiritual circumstances do not answer to this descriptive word, "lost;" and if they do, then mourn and lament, but yield not to despair; for it was "to seek and to save that which was lost," that "the Son of man" is come.

Sorrow and humiliation for sin are indispensably requisite to all who would enter the temple of the New Testament. Do we wish that Jesus should befriend us, we must plead that we are "lost;" and should we even have good qualities and good works whereof to boast, we must on no account make them our plea. For the Lord might answer us, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Let others boast of the sincerity of their repentance, the fervor of their piety, the purity of their desires, or whatever else they please; our plea must be, "Lord Jesus, we are lost and ruined, therefore have mercy on us!" This appeal, humbly urged, will never meet with a repulse. "The Lord abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself;" and he declares that the humbled and the lost are the objects of his saving mercy. To save them, yes, to seek them out, he declares to be his peculiar office, the real end of his mission into our miserable world. God be thanked, that he came to seek us, and that we had not first to seek him; for had this been the case, who would ever have come to him? We are not merely lost as travellers, who, by deliberation and the help of guide-posts, can regain their right road; but we are lost, as a piece of silver is lost, which of itself will not return into our purse, and must be carefully sought. Blessed are we, that He, who alone can save, condescends also to seek. And this is beautifully exemplified in what follows concerning Naaman the Syrian.

"And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against

me." The termination which this mysterious history was likely to take now begins to show itself. Three points claim our attentive consideration—

I. Naaman’s preparation for his journey;

II. His passport; and III. His arrival in the Holy Land.

Chapter 89

03.40. Naaman's Preparation for His Journey

Naaman’s Preparation for His Journey The pathetic sigh of the Israelitish maiden, "Oh that my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" produced its effect. It is surprising what important results may ensue from a passing and accidental word, be it spoken by whom it may, if only accompanied with the Divine blessing. How could it have entered the mind of this little foreigner in Damascus, to attach such importance to a wish thus uttered by her simplicity! yet what a succession of glorious events gradually proceeded from it! And why did they proceed from it, but because the great Being, who governs all things, designed that thus it should be? Through his own overruling wisdom and goodness it was made a means of shattering the strong holds of heathenism, and of wresting from Satan a portion of his power: and, indeed, who can say in how many other ways this apparently trivial event was to effect good in the world, even unto this day! It may serve, at least, to remind us how valuable is the least connection with any one who is at all connected with that church of God, which is appointed by Himself to be a blessing in the world. His servants are the salt of the earth, and their very words are not uttered in vain. How agreeable will be their surprise, when the Lord shall hereafter discover to them the beautiful plants that, under his blessing, have sprung up in stillness and obscurity from the good seed, which they, by their words and actions, had unconsciously scattered! Then they will perceive that they have not lived in vain with regard to others, and that "their works," which no stream of time can sweep into oblivion, shall "follow them" into eternity. On Mount Caucasus, in Georgia, there is a people, anciently known by the name of Iberians, who in the early part of the fourth century, when all around them was spiritual and moral darkness like the shadow of death, became possessed of the blessings of the gospel in the following remarkable manner. The Iberians having been successfully at war with a neighboring people, among whom Christianity had gained some ground, brought away a young captive Christian maiden, and sold her into slavery. The child was purchased by a reputable family, who as little suspected, as did Naaman’s wife, the value of the purchase they had made. For the maiden was a vessel of Divine mercy, and profusely as her tears might have been shed in secret, she found consolation in her Savior: and quietly and willingly performed all, and even more, than was required of her. By her obliging disposition and great fidelity, which were rare qualities among the Iberians, she soon acquired the confidence and affection of those around her.

It one day happened that, according to the custom of the country, a sick child was carried about the neighborhood from door to door, in hope that some one might be able to suggest a remedy for its disease. But none could render the least assistance, and most people wondered that any hope of the child’s recovery should be entertained; so that the poor parents, with their dying infant, proceeded on their melancholy round with increasing despondency and fear. At length it occurred to them to show the child to the amiable stranger; they thought it possible that in her country a cure for its complaint might be known, with which she might be acquainted; and as no other resource appeared, it was resolved upon as a last resort. The bed was immediately carried to the house where Nunnia, the Christian maid, lived as a domestic slave. On hearing their desire, she remarked, with some embarrassment, that she was but a poor girl, and quite unable to advise

them; but, she added, with a smiling countenance, I could direct you to One, who is not only able to restore the child to health, but who, were it already dead, can even recover it to life. The afflicted parents eagerly inquiring who the person was, and where he might be found, she replied, "He is a great and mighty Lord, who fills the throne of heaven, but he willingly humbles himself to those who seek him, and he is all compassion and love." They implored her to fetch him. The maiden immediately retired to bow her knees before her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom she prayed, "Manifest thyself, O Lord, for thine own glory; show thyself, and grant thy help!" And on returning to the child with the joyful assurance in her heart that the Lord had heard her petition, lo, the child opened its eyes, smiled, and was restored! In a transport of joy the happy parents returned home with their treasure, and related to every one they met, what a great and glorious event had taken place. But to Him who had wrought this miraculous cure, the honor was not ascribed; it was given exclusively to the little slave, whom they now regarded as a supernatural being. The report flew quickly through the country, and soon reached the ears of the queen, who not long afterwards herself becoming sick, thought immediately of the little slave. She sent messengers to request that she would visit her; but Nunnia declined the invitation; for she was greatly distressed that they should persist in ascribing to her an honor that belonged to her Lord alone. The queen, however, determined to visit her in person, and ordered herself to be conveyed to the house where Nunnia served. The maiden was greatly affected at seeing her. She prayed again, and the queen likewise returned home in health. Miraus, the king, was overjoyed when he saw his beloved consort return in health, and made instant preparations to send the richest and most costly presents to her, who was thought to have performed so great a miracle. But the princess dissuaded it, assuring him that it would afflict the mysterious child, for that she despised all earthly wealth, and could only be rewarded for her services by their worshipping her own God with her. The king was not a little astonished; but the circumstance made, for the present, no further impression upon his mind. Upon the whole, it appears that the flash of celestial light which these two extraordinary cures had brought into the darkness of Iberia, produced at this period no lasting effects. It happened, however, not very long afterwards, that the king being on a hunting party, and following his game with unusual ardor, lost himself in the depths of a wood. In this situation he was surprised by a dense fog, which quite separated him from his train, and every effort to extricate himself only served to entangle him more in the solitary wilderness. Evening approached, and his embarrassment became extreme. He sounded his horn, but the answer he received was from the echoes of the surrounding cliffs, which increased his feeling of loneliness. It was now he remembered what the foreign maiden had said of the power of her great, invisible King, whose throne and habitation were on high, but who was everywhere present with those that sought him. If this be true, thought Miraus, what is there to prevent his appearing for me? As the thought arose, he bent his knee in the solitary wilderness, and prayed, "O Thou whom the stranger calls her God! Jesus, if thou art, and art almighty, O show it now, and recover me out of this perplexity! If thou openest for me a way of escape, my heart, my life, and all that I have shall be thine." The words were no sooner uttered than the dark mist began to disperse, the heavens appeared serenely blue, and the astonished king, having proceeded a few steps, regained his track, and recognized the place where he was. He returned home in safety, but deeply affected. He related his adventure to his queen, and they no longer doubted that the God of the little slave was the living and true God, for they had experienced and felt him to be so. The next morning they repaired to Nunnia; for they thought that she before all others ought to hear what great things had

come to pass. With considerable emotion the king related also to her the wonderful event, and then both the king and the queen kindly took the maiden by the hand, and entreated her to tell them more of Jesus. From that moment the royal pair were seen sitting like teachable children at the feet of the lowly slave, and Nunnia proclaimed to them, with unaffected simplicity, all that she herself knew of her Savior and of his wonderful works. They listened to her words with avidity, and their hearts melted and burned within them. Nor was it long before a still more interesting sight presented itself; for both the king and the queen thought that they could not confer a greater benefit on their people, than by proclaiming to them the blessed gospel which informed them of God, as having been manifest in the flesh. The king therefore preached to the men, and the queen to the women and maidens; the Lord blessed the message, and the people received the good word with gladness. Jesus entered the hearts, as well as the habitations, of these savage hordes, and a new creation sprung up in the gloom of their moral desolation. On the ruins of their idolatrous altars were erected cheerful Christian edifices, which loudly resounded with the praises of Him, who also here had searched for his own sheep, and sought them out. Among the descendants of this people in our days, the Spirit of life has again begun to breathe. Active and anointed messengers have again displayed among them the standard of the cross, and the most gratifying proofs are increasingly exhibited, that the grace which planted this vineyard in so wonderful a manner fifteen hundred years ago, has not departed from it.

What think we of this occurrence? Is it not delightful and encouraging? How striking the resemblance it bears to the history of Naaman! Yes! Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever." How easy is it for Him to accomplish his purposes by the smallest as by the mightiest agents! And how well does he know when and where to find his sheep! "For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall return." "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God."

But, to return to Damascus. When Naaman had heard the declaration of his little slave, he resolved on following the hint which had been given him, and soon received permission and encouragement from his king to undertake the journey. If Naaman asked this permission he did right; though in our visiting the spiritual springs of Israel, it is not necessary for us to confer with man, or to be troubled about the approbation or disapprobation of "those that are without." The king having been informed of what the little Israelitish maid had said, replied, Then go thither! Go to Samaria! The preservation of a life so valuable as that of the distinguished commander of his armies, was all-important to him. Could he have entertained a hope that relief might be obtained from the physicians and priests of his own country, the jealous monarch would not have ceded to the hated Jewish people the honor of the cure. Now, however, he not only does this, but more; he even offers the invalid a letter of recommendation under his own hand. This royal document was immediately written and sealed. It was addressed, "To Jehoram, king of Israel," and was as follows:—"Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." It must be admitted that this epistle was worthy of its author, as evincing the great blindness of his heart. He imagined that if any one in Israel were possessed of miraculous powers, it must be the king of Israel himself. As if the Almighty judged as man judgeth, or had any respect of persons in dispensing his gifts and graces; or, as if he imparted supernatural powers as an abiding possession, to be controlled and exercised

at human pleasure. Oh what folly and absurdity are uniformly exhibited, whenever the ungodly and profane adventure to meddle with "the things of the Spirit of God!" The sick man, after thankfully receiving the royal letters, hastened to make the necessary preparations for his departure, in a manner that became his rank. His most splendid equipages were prepared, and his officers ordered to accompany him, with a numerous train of domestics on camels. Money was likewise abundantly provided. He took with him the large sum of ten talents of silver, or about sixteen thousand dollars, besides six thousand pieces of gold, of which the greater part appears to have been intended to enrich the man who should effect his cure. For the same fortunate individual the ten splendid changes of raiment appear to have been intended. Thus royally equipped, he took the direct route to the land of promise, the land of his hopes. From all this pomp it would appear that the ideas of Naaman were not much more enlightened or spiritual than those of his royal master. He, likewise, expected to find in the prophets of Samaria little more than a kind of magicians and enchanters, similar to those of the heathen world. Of a God who dispenses blessings, and commands them to be dispensed, without money and without price, he had not the slightest conception. And, indeed, it is not natural to the corrupt heart of man to guess at the noble principles of real religion. That persons should be most welcome to the throne of grace who feel themselves most poor and destitute, and most willing to obtain what they desire without any desert on their part, is incomprehensible to "the natural man." How difficult is it to us, even when renewed by grace, to sacrifice to this truth our legal conceptions, our ideas of service and reward! Alas! how often do we approach the Lord, like Naaman, laden with imaginary gifts, or else with vows to present them! How frequently, how imperceptibly do we again fall back upon the foolish thought, that not until we can reckon upon something of our own are we at liberty to enjoy the consolation of the Divine promises! We do not then prostrate ourselves before God, and present our supplications like Daniel, "for the sake of His mercy;" we profess indeed to depend on the merits of our great Surety, but we depend, in fact, on the notion of our own acquirements, subtle as may be the covering that conceals such a notion from us. Yet why do we do so, when it is not only our privilege to ask and to receive "wine and milk without money and without price," but this is even enjoined upon us as a duty? Such is the arrangement before the throne of Jehovah. Oh, let us conform to this blessed regulation!

03.41. Naaman's Passport

Naaman’s Passport

Naaman commenced his journey under the patronage and with the passport of his lord; which at every stage would secure him an uninterrupted passage, and the greatest attentions. For our comfort we possess a similar safe conduct, though of infinitely greater value, and of a more exalted description. It is the same that was given to the sick man in the gospel, to whom Jesus said, "Go in peace." And of which the disciples were the subjects in the request made by Jesus to his enemies, "Let these go their way."

We too, brethren, are set out upon a journey; we are continually and rapidly advancing in it. Whether we know and wish it or not, our progress is without intermission or pause. This journey commences with our life, and the hour of our death is the last stage of it. We do not, it is true, recline in a carriage, neither do we perform it on horseback or in a ship; but the wings of time, on which we repose, move with a far more vigorous and rapid speed. Every stroke of the clock warns us of our progress. Every movement of the pendulum proclaims with a solemn sound, "Ye travel onwards!" How lately did our road lie through the smiling fields of spring! It seems but as yesterday. Now, the roses have faded; and soon the leaves will wither, and fall rustling to the earth. Then snow succeeds, and before we are aware the lovely flowers of spring will again shoot forth: thus time rolls on. And how long will it be, before we fade like the leaves, for all flesh is as grass! The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, and whither are we travelling but towards that eternity, into which all the streams of life are successively discharged. But eternity is distinguished by two provinces of very different natures, separated by an impassable gulf; the one a lake of fire, the other a paradise of bliss; the one, heaven, the other, hell. In the one, or in the other, all will be landed. The last wave of time casts us upon the shores of the one province or the other.

Now, it may fare ill with us on our pilgrimage. We may fall into the hands of formidable enemies; we are liable to be attacked and subdued, and to suffer imprisonments, whose horrors are not to be described. For do not thousands daily become entangled with the delusion of sin, and are they not more and more encompassed by its fatal snares, till in its horrible embraces they are overtaken by eternal perdition and death? Remember Ahab, Judas, and Herod. How many of the same spirit do we everywhere behold! How many who willingly take upon them the yoke of Satan, and become quite involved in self-deception and falsehood, as if they had sold themselves to do evil, as if they had voluntarily consigned themselves to that everlasting torment which is prepared for the devil and his angels! Think of the wretched beings over whom Jesus so pathetically pronounced, "Woe! woe!" Thousands fall into the hands of Moses, by whom they are accused: the accusation is heard before the highest tribunal; each delinquent is condemned, and his name written in the book of cursing. Thousands are cast by an alarmed conscience into the furnace of despair, and despair is the stigma of the reprobate. Thousands, at the command of the Judge, are dragged by the last enemy, the king of terrors, to eternal desolation; alas, who can conceive to what misery and torment! and thousands in their last extremity will cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!"

but will be doomed to hear the answer, "I know you not: depart from me, ye workers of iniquity!"

These are dreadful miseries, horrible events. What are all the afflictions of earth compared with them? What is loss of fortune? what the loss of health, or of the world's esteem? to languish in bodily pain, what is it, when compared with such spiritual evils? They are all too insignificant to be mentioned in comparison. Job, Lazarus, and Bartimeus, in their misery, were a thousand times more enviable than the rich man clothed in purple, or than Saul, Herod, and many others in their robes of state. But it may be anxiously inquired, Is there no escape from these horrors? Yes, my brethren, many escape them. In what way? They possess a passport. He who travels without one, will doubtless one day be arrested as a vagabond or criminal. A passport, if it be genuine, is a great protection on a journey, but false ones here are of no avail, they lead to certain and greater disgrace and ruin. Yet many, alas! make use of them, and many, it is to be feared, even among ourselves. Some make out their own passports, which contain much self-applause. "We are," they say, "not bad people; we give to the poor, we do what is right!" and there is no end to their self-deceptions. Others obtain their passports from the world, in which they are described as excellent people, held in general estimation. But where did the world obtain its authority for furnishing passports? Its seal is neither legal nor valid. And even though you should possess a passport written by the children of God, testifying of you that you are members of the same kingdom; place no dependence on it. How often have they been mistaken in their testimony, and through shortsightedness or ignorance given false certificates! Your credentials must come from far higher authority, even from Him who once said to the hostile multitude, "Let these go their way;" and to the woman, "Go in peace." Yes, this woman received the true passport, the only one that is valid under all circumstances, and in all contingencies; and it is possessed by the very least of those who belong to Christ.

Nothing of the kind could have been granted as a matter of course, to any one of our fallen race; for we are all by nature children of wrath. But the Son of God had compassion on us, he became our Surety, having undertaken to save that which was lost, and to present us holy and unblameable and unreprovable in the sight of God. He "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Thus "by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous;" He having not only rendered it possible for Grace and Mercy to sign their passport, but for the Divine Holiness and Justice to subscribe it with a firm, unwavering hand. For Mercy alone would never have signed it. God then, and God alone, issues the passport, even the God of mercy and truth; and he does so on the ground of the meritorious obedience of our atoning Mediator. From having thus alluded to the Christian's spiritual passport, it may be further worth while to glance at a few of its contents. It describes the name of any one who is its owner, to be such as no man knoweth, save he that hath it; and his age, as not comprehensible within the chronicles of this world. It speaks of God as our Father, and of Jerusalem above as the mother of us all. It speaks of some wilderness of Mount Sinai as the place of our natural birth, and of Zion as our spiritual residence; of our rank as priestly and royal; and of our profession as that of spiritual combatants, benefactors, healers, and children of song. It speaks of our fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, by our having been made partakers of the Holy Ghost. It speaks of the object of our pilgrimage, as the enjoyment of things which God hath prepared for those that love him; of our being borne occasionally as on an eagle's wings, and clothed with the garments of salvation; of our speaking the language of Canaan, and of

our being fair and comely in the sight of God; of our having the eyes of our understanding enlightened, of our ear as opened daily to Divine discipline; and of our tongue as loosed to confess the name of Jesus, and to praise the Lord. If we inspect it once more, in order to notice how far it is valid, we find it is valid to the heavenly city, where there is no night, and where there is no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to enlighten it; where every tear is wiped from all eyes, and men hunger no more, neither thirst any more. Better is it that our right hand should forget its cunning, than that we should forget this city of God. Our passport thither implies also a command given to ourselves to go forward in seeking it; and a command to all creatures, and all events, to co-operate for our advancement thither; a command to the angels to take charge concerning us; and a command to all adverse powers in the world to "let these go their way." To every bearer of this important document, it is expressly enjoined, "Be of good courage, fear not; go in peace." The angels obey its commands with delight; and the powers of the adversary from necessity. Foolish then, indeed, is that person who can possess it, and yet not anoint his head and wash his face, and leave worldly anxiety and sorrow behind him.

Many a one is, indeed, provided with this document of heavenly credentials, though hardly at present aware of it. Or, he carries it about with him sealed, and thus is but little acquainted with the pleasant nature of its contents. Such are bidden to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure:" which if they do, then, however their passport may be for the present concealed from themselves, its value is not impaired, but it will still secure to them a safe conduct. Nevertheless, the consciousness of its possession, and the ability to decipher it, are invaluable blessings, which we should daily aspire to attain.

03.42. Naaman's Arrival in the Holy Land

Naaman’s Arrival in the Holy Land At the end of one or two days’ journey, our traveller came in sight of the mountains of Israel. In what a different light did he now behold them stretching out before him, from what he had done on former occasions, when at the head of his trained legions, and mounted on his war horse, he had proudly contemplated them at a distance, in order to select the height on which to unfurl his victorious banner. In proportion to his confidence of obtaining a cure, would be the home feeling, yea, the tender affection, with which he would now survey the country, opening like a place of refuge to his view. Beyond those hills he looks for the realization of all his hopes, and his heart bounds thither much swifter than his wheels can carry him. He is now, moreover, likely to raise a standard upon Israel’s hills, which shall bear the inscription, "Jehovah is my help." Now also a battle is to be fought; but the gods of Naaman will fall in the encounter, and he himself become a captive to the Lord God of the whole earth. He will now, as formerly, not retire empty from the field; but his conquests shall be imperishable in their consequences. As at other times, the song of victory and triumph shall be raised, but it will be such as the angels of God can join. Of all this Naaman has at present no idea. A fountain of bodily health is all he seeks, and all he hopes to find. But God has greater designs towards him. His route conducts him for some time along the foot of lofty mountains to the lake of Gennesaret; then he passes Capernaum and Bethsaida, and enters the plain of Jezreel. And now Samaria, the lofty residence of the king of Israel, soon becomes visible. This was the place of his destination, and surely on such an occasion as this, even the heart of Naaman could not have been without strange emotions as he approached it. Naaman, upon his arrival in the city, "brought the letter" of Benhadad "to the king of Israel." Whether his having "brought" it implies, that he did so in person, though a leper, we are not told. But of this we are certain, that his unexpected visit, and the contents of the letter, gave no little embarrassment to the king of Israel; who read in it as follows: "Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy." The king, indignant at this strange communication, rent his royal robe, and exclaimed with a vehemence incomprehensible, at first, to all around him, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore, consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." But what unnecessary alarm, and what groundless uncalled-for passion, as if he were required to perform the miracle! Nevertheless, even here there is something commendable. For Jehoram himself is indignant at being thought to arrogate the place of God; whereas through ages past unto the present day, how many who have professed and called themselves Christians, have everywhere virtually done this, and are doing it still! This remark deserves the deep consideration of all who profess either spiritually to kill or to make alive. And what else but the latter of these alternatives are we ourselves doing, if we practically renounce our dependence on the grace of Christ, and can think of no homage but that which is claimed by our own self-sufficiency? If the letter of Benhadad manifests the blindness of a heathen, the burst of feeling from Jehoram strikingly shows some influence of the light of truth which still shone in Israel. For he is not only sensible that the leprosy, as inflicted by the special visitation of God, can be removed by nothing but Divine interposition, and that its cure would be as

life from the dead, but though in imitation of his fathers he was addicted to idolatry, he is convinced in his heart that Jehovah is God, and that in His sight, there is no offence of greater magnitude, than to deify the creature, by investing it with the honor due to God alone. Therefore he is seized with instantaneous consternation, at a request seeming to be addressed to him, which he is thoroughly convinced should be addressed only to the living God. We may perhaps be surprised to meet with so much true Israelitish sentiment and feeling in Jehoram; but it is not difficult to account for it, if we consider how much light yet remained in Israel, and how readily even bad men can avail themselves of such light to serve their own purposes, or when these are not counteracted by it. In the present case, it shed some of its rays around one who was still a miserable being; a striking instance of whose perturbable state of mind is further seen in his causeless and distrustful apprehension of renewed hostilities on the part of Ben-hadad; an apprehension which, at least, should not have so unnerved a man, who had witnessed such wonderful proofs that there was for Israel a Keeper that never slept, and who could deliver the prey out of the mouth of the lion. But Jehoram's pusillanimity was likewise evinced in the embarrassment which he betrayed, perhaps in the very presence of the afflicted Syrian, as if in Israel a leper had never been healed; as if in the whole history of that people no instance of Almighty help could be found to justify the hopes of Naaman; also in his having so entirely forgotten, that there was a prophet in his own dominions, of whose wonderful powers he had himself received ocular demonstration. So that what little light he showed as a son of Israel, was merely accidental, and such as it was not in his power entirely to quench; while in every other respect he was a contemptible character, an apostate without faith, and altogether devoid of elevated desires and real dignity.

If Jehoram's unholy embarrassment at the request made by the Syrian moves our pity or indignation, let us turn it against ourselves. For how frequently do we, in like manner, and upon the most insignificant occasions, become disturbed so as to betray the honor of God, and of the kingdom to which we belong! At the smallest misfortune, or the most trivial difficulty, we can suddenly disquiet and demean ourselves, as though our faith in the Lord, and in all his promises had been but fancy and delusion. Ought not our spiritual character to be above permitting us, even under the most mysterious dispensations, to sink down thus into practical unbelief, so as to bring into discredit with others, our high calling and holy profession? Instead of so readily speaking about the unpleasant things that have happened to us, ought we not much rather to be animated with devout zeal, to show forth more faithfully the salvation and lovingkindness of our God? Ought we not infinitely prefer becoming a reproach and the offscouring of all things, rather than bring a reproach upon that kingdom, whose citizens we have professed ourselves before the world? We have every day experienced mercies and blessings unspeakably great, and far outnumbering whatever cross incidents may have befallen us, and we ought so to remember them as, at least, to put all our complaining to shame. And then what is any one of those cross incidents which thus astonish and confound us, but things equally ordained by the only wise God, and brought about by his mysterious providence, all for our final benefit, and for his glory? Yes, every such thing is made to harmonize with his own gracious designs. But what was Naaman now to do? for this afflicted man, who had arrived so elated with hope, finds that his fair prospect has suddenly vanished away. Jehoram can no more assist him than could Benhadad and the Syrian physicians; but confesses his inability to serve him, or to recommend him to any one who can. What a distressing situation for Naaman! And yet all this was just as it should be; for now is the way prepared, wherein the Lord will magnify his name and display his power. The moment is arrived in which

Elisha can appear, and manifest gloriously, that Jehovah is God, and not Baal, nor any other. Verily, the whole world can find no assistance, except from the God of this despised and unassuming man. Now, as a last resource, all hopes are directed thither, and in him Naaman shall rejoice, to the honor of that God whom Elisha worshipped. When the world has exhausted its consolations and resources, then it becomes manifest, that the house of Israel is not so utterly worthless as is too generally suspected. How welcome, at such times, is the love and the faithfulness of a believing Christian! how seasonable his consolations, and more precious than gold and much fine gold! Where the resources of human art and succour terminate, there the efficiency of real Christianity commences. Where the sun of worldly glory sets, there the consolations of God spring up as light in the darkness. When the mighty upon earth are constrained to confess, "We know of no remedy," the servants of the Most High can lift up their hands unto God in the heavens, and can draw down that help which the world cannot give; and for any affliction, for any plague or trouble, can obtain the healing balm of Divine truth, and an everlasting cure. The resources from which they derive such help are never exhausted, for "their help is in the name of the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth!" He is their "refuge in times of trouble," whether their own trouble, or that of others. God acts by their means, and they act by Him. He is the Fountain of Israel, and they are the channels through which his mercies flow.

03.43. The Beggar: 2Ki_5:8-10

Chapter 12 The Beggar

2 Kings 5:8-10

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," is the standing law of God’s kingdom. If we now attend seriously to the sequel of Naaman’s history, we may become, by the Divine blessing, the more disposed to obey that law.

"And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

Three particulars here claim our attention—

I. The interposition of Elisha;

II. The journey to Jericho; and III. The prophet’s directions.

03.44. The Intervention of Elisha

The Intervention of Elisha The aspect of things for Naaman was at present not very cheering. Could then the hint of the Israelitish maiden have been only a delusion? Had imagination raised up visions which sad reality was to dispel? Naaman had reached the end of his journey, but hitherto it appeared to have been performed in vain. Is then Samaria as Damascus? Is there no help in Israel? Was the leper’s last hope to be given up? Not so. Here was only one of those many instances, in which it has been "good for a man to wait and quietly hope for" the Lord’s mercies. The more desperate the case appeared, the more signally was it to display the Lord’s power. The world with its wisdom, its skill, and its expedients, was first put to shame: and the reason is obvious; for the granting of Divine relief, after every human means had failed, would the more evidently redound to the glory of God, and to the consequent benefit of man. The news of the celebrated stranger’s arrival in Samaria, and of the scene that had taken place in the palace, quickly spread throughout Israel, and soon reached Elisha’s humble dwelling at Jericho. When he heard of the reception given by the king to the afflicted stranger, he was not a little affected by it. He was devoted to the honor of Jehovah, and thus to see it clouded, could not fail to pain him at the heart. Could the king already have forgotten that there is a living God in Israel! Could he thus, expose Israel to the scorn of the heathen, as if here also the fountains were dried up, as if all truth had failed! The zeal of the prophet does not pine away in musings, but displays itself in action. He instantly dispatches a messenger to the capital, with orders to appear before the monarch, and to say to him in his name, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel!" What great words! How sublime this interposition of the man of God! He comes forth from his seclusion, like the sun breaking through the dark clouds. He assumes, indeed, a high and lofty tone, but it is warranted. It is no idle boast. Let others rend their garments at will; but for Israel on such an occasion to do so were unworthy. The kingdom of Jehovah is not a realm of poverty. How noble and public-spirited was the feeling of the man of God! Wave proudly aloft, thou banner of Zion. There is no shade like thine. Come hither, come hither, all ye who need counsel and help. What a whole world cannot furnish we here possess. Is it wisdom that you seek? Do not doubtfully inquire what it is, and where it is to be found. It is found already; its fire is in Zion. Is it peace? Rend not your clothes, as if peace were unheard of in Zion. Seek it on her rich pastures. Here its streams murmur, and its gentle breezes blow. Is it righteousness? O take courage, though you have not yet attained it in your spiritual bondage. In Zion a heavenly righteousness prevails, the righteousness of God, and you may be clothed with it, as with a robe of light. Is it strength, to triumph over the cares of life and the fear of death, that you desire? The inventions of human wisdom cannot impart it. But fear not, there is still no reason for despondency. Come to Salem, and we engage that whatever opposes you shall be vanquished at your feet. Yes, search out your innermost wants, express your most hidden desires, however great or many they may be; give vent to them all: within the boundaries of Christ’s kingdom we promise you their most ample gratification and fulfillment. Here there is an end of poverty; here heaven pours out its fulness. Here is the termination of every grief. Then "let him that is athirst come." Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth

not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

03.45. The Journey to Jericho

The Journey to Jericho

Elisha’s messenger arrives in Samaria, hastens to the palace, and discharges his commission. Jehoram receives the communication with pleasure. It relieves him from a secret embarrassment, and he therefore readily endures the pungency of Elisha’s words. He causes the sick commander to be informed, that in Jericho there dwells a prophet to whom he might repair. No guide-post ever imparted more welcome information to a bewildered traveller. Naaman’s joy must have been indescribable. The message surely sounded to him like the oars of an approaching boat to a shipwrecked mariner; like the voice of help to one who has fallen into a deep pit. "Yes," would he recollect, "it was of a prophet that the little maid in Damascus spoke!" and his sensations at this moment would resemble those of the eastern sages, when, on issuing from the gate of Jerusalem, they beheld themselves still guided by the star which was to conduct them to the object of their desires and expectations. His cheering prospects, which had been so obscured and clouded, would assume at this happy intelligence their former freshness, and his confidence of recovery would be now more ardent and consoling than before.

If God send us forth, and guide us on our way, let the direction seem ever so strange and bewildering, we cannot but reach in safety the place of our destination. A hundred times will our prospects darken before us and around us, but a hundred times will they re-open with increased brightness. A hundred times will our hopes appear to have expired, but as often will they revive, and brighten up with fresh gatherings of glory. And having finally overcome the difficulties of the wilderness, ye shall serve God in his holy mountain; and then will the confession of Joshua be ours, "There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken" concerning us, Joshua 21:45.

Naaman had no sooner received the welcome tidings of Elisha’s message, than his retinue was immediately on the move. His camels and horses were harnessed in haste, the chariots were led forth, and the splendid eastern procession, now departing, through the streets of Samaria, was once more the attraction and renewed talk of its inhabitants, many of whom perhaps expressed their doubts whether the prophet would heal him. Naaman trusts that he will; and probably he never returned from the victorious battle-field with half the interest with which he now advanced towards Jericho. The distance was speedily overcome, nor was Naaman long in discovering the humble abode of the prophet; for surely there could not be a child in Jericho that had not heard of Elisha, or that did not mention his name with veneration and love. His memorable miracle of healing the waters was enough to acquire him the gratitude of the whole city. As Naaman proceeded towards the prophet’s dwelling, he was likely to be greeted with many a joyful assurance, that if he came to seek from the man of God the cure of his disease, he had not undertaken such a journey in vain. Surely his feelings of impatience to gain an interview with this wonderful man would be very great. At length the chariot stops before a lowly habitation, which is pointed out to him as that of the prophet. But was this the residence of the man who was to do him

a service, which he had sought in vain from all the world, from all the most distinguished physicians and priests both far and near? Little probably had Naaman learned that power may be clothed in the simplest attire, and that it is only emptiness or impotency that needs to decorate itself with pomp and parade. There were also many other things with which he was equally unacquainted; but they will gradually come under his observation, and will accomplish a strange revolution in his mind. If the meanness of Elisha's dwelling had alarmed the pride of Naaman, his extraordinary reception proved to him in the highest degree vexatious and offensive. The noble leper had doubtless imagined, that the moment his splendid equipage should halt at that humble door, the prophet would be out to receive him, and submissively tender him the offer of his services. But everything turned out differently from what the hero had expected, and contrary to the style and manners of his country. The prophet was well aware, what person was waiting at his gate, but was not the least elated by it. Yet, as if the communication made to him had respected the most ordinary and unimportant event, he remained undisturbed in his humble dwelling. All he did was to send a servant, probably Gehazi, briefly to inform Naaman what he must do in order to be cleansed of his plague. This procedure appears the more extraordinary in Elisha, because everything like haughtiness and reserve was altogether foreign to his character and his calling as a representative of Divine grace and goodness. But Elisha was perfectly master of what he did, and his whole proceeding, though in appearance indicating self-sufficiency, and even pride, only attested a high degree of spiritual wisdom and prudence in the service of the Lord his God. The noble stranger was, at the very outset, to be made to feel that he had not now to do with a Syrian magician or an idolatrous priest, but with the servant of a Majesty which has no respect for persons, and in whose presence all human conceptions of great and small, high and low, dwindle into nothing. He had to learn that the distinctions which very properly exist in this world, are as nothing in the eyes of Him, before whom all alike are sinners, devoid of that glory which alone has merit in His sight; that splendid rank and high sounding titles, though justly numbered among the things that give importance to dust and ashes, are but as a vapour in the estimation of Him, neither constitute any claim to Divine favor; that he must not therefore expect to be regarded of God as superior to the meanest, but be contented to accept the help of Jehovah, simply on the ground that he is a God of mercy to miserable sinners. Of this and similar truths Elisha doubtless wished, in the most impressive manner, to convince his noble guest; and therefore it is that we see him, with holy self-denial, laying aside his obliging affability, and assuming a demeanor towards the stranger which seemed rather to say, "Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet!" which was characteristic less of the mild benignity, than of the dazzling majesty of Him whom the prophet was called to represent among men. But in how estimable a light does the man of God appear on that very account! Can all the preachers of the gospel in modern times venture to survey themselves in this living mirror? Alas! how frequently does pastoral deportment in the present day seem to justify the supposition, that the Lord, whose interpreters and representatives we are, judgeth "with man's judgment;" that He has given a preference to rank, station, and wealth; and that he stands nearer to the noble, the dignified, and wealthy, than to those of low degree. But, in truth, the ministers of Christ in general, are now too little regarded by themselves or by others as the representatives of Jehovah and of His mind. And this is the well-merited reward of our love of worldly pre-eminence. Even those, in whose presence we lower the standard of truth with obsequious pusillanimity, despise us in their hearts, much as they may value and compliment us as "well-bred" and "gentlemanly." Oh may the "Lord of all" mercifully interpose to restrain this contemptible spirit on

the part of his poor servants, and to establish them on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, from whence the fascinations of dignity and rank would be viewed as a vapor!

Doubtless there was nothing that Elisha more fervently desired than that it might be granted him to place what we may call the beggar's staff in the hands of his noble visitant. Neither could this desire be prompted by any other motive than love itself; for he was perfectly acquainted with the promise in Psalms 72:1-20, in which the Lord engages to answer the cry of the poor and needy. Oh blessed state of poverty and need, contradictory as such an exclamation may sound! For though every one is poor by nature, yet it is not every one that knows it, or desires to know it. For very few are humble enough to live habitually by grace; to rest habitually on the merits of another; to be led along by the hand of Divine mercy. Pride and self-love are our greatest obstacles. Poor and needy as we are, we are not easily made sensible of our real condition. Providence may visit us with chastisements, and misfortune upon misfortune may come upon us, but we are often more ready to repine and despond, than to imagine that such visitations are "for our profit" and improvement; and how often do we still remain unhumbled under them! Instruction, education, example, correction, and punishment, may do much for man, but they can never make him truly humble in spirit. A whole array of Scripture passages, exhortations, and philosophical evidences of transgressions, judgments, calamities, and I know not what besides, will of themselves produce no effect to the purpose. He will often rather break than bend. The change so devoutly to be wished is the work alone of Him who "giveth repentance unto Israel." And to be clothed with this humility of spirit is better than to be arrayed in princely garments. But how is it effected? Sometimes by alarming convictions of the strictness, extent, and spirituality of the Divine law. Hereby the man becomes sensible that his quantum of supposed virtue falls far short of what he is bound to pay. He therefore forms resolutions and purposes of amendment; for he is now awfully persuaded that the Divine commandments must be kept! that without obedience there is no holiness, and that without holiness there is no happiness. But, alas! the more earnestly he endeavors after all this, in his own strength, the more overwhelming are his discouragements. For experience now teaches him that he is retrograding instead of advancing; that he sinks deeper every day, becomes poorer instead of richer, and accumulates debts instead of discharging them. His awful apprehensions are increased; he renews his exertions; but repeated shortcomings confirm his conviction that he is bankrupt; that he has nothing wherewith to pay. Yet he hears the gospel of peace proclaiming, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He hears the simple message of the cross, and a beam of hope pierces the gloom of his despondency. He sees himself cast upon Christ as his only hope; and at length he falls down, and humbles himself before the throne of grace. The consciousness of being a helpless sinner, and that there is salvation only through the precious blood of Christ, is now that beggar'sstaff in his hand which God alone can give. This humble state of mind cannot long remain concealed from the world. It is a spectacle of joy in the presence of the angels of God; and it becomes a spectacle of wonder and praise, as also of reproach and scorn, to men. To real Christians it is an unspeakable joy that another brother is born to them, that their Lord still works mightily, that his Spirit breathes upon the dry bones, and that his kingdom prospers. The angels again rejoice that their King displays more and more the exceeding riches of his grace, and that they can thus welcome another fellow-heir of glory. In the Scriptures we nowhere read that there is "joy in heaven" over men's acquirement of gold, or nobility, or splendid appointments, or crowns of worldly praise. But the humility and change of mind of which we speak, are an occasion of joy to the whole kingdom of God; while the devil only, and his

agents, are abashed at the sight; a glorious testimony to the value of Christian humility. But it is not others only to whom it is the occasion of joy. The subject of it himself soon feels the comfort that attends it; and irksome and revolting as he thought it beforehand, it is now his welcome element. For it is the very element of heaven; the element of benevolence and love. And as God's children kindly welcome him as a brother, so God himself regards him as no more a slave, but a son. He bids him to "be careful for nothing," but to "cast all his care on Him who careth for him." He assures him of His everlasting love; and that He will never leave him, nor forsake him. Here then is the true honor; here are "the true riches;" here alone is happiness. Little as it is thought of by the world, all the true nobility that the world ever knew have been characterized and distinguished thereby. Abraham, and a train of successive prophets, and the apostles have been clothed with it. The best fathers of the church, and the best reformers, were most remarkable for it, and "counted it all joy." And shall not we highly prize and seek after that which will rank us in the same class with them? Of what real value to me are all other distinctions, however imposing? These may any day belong to traitors and infidels, and they perish with the using. Not so that clothing of humility, which is never put on by the ungodly. With this beggar's staff we may courageously pursue our path to heaven, where it will become as a palm of victory in our hands. What multiplied motives have we for not being ashamed of it here! But we are not beggars at thy door, thou miserable world! From thee we desire nothing. Keep what thou hast. Thy poverty can afford us no pleasure. We prostrate ourselves before another gate; and oh, how great and glorious are the benefits we there receive! "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." To those to whom it was once said, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," it is now said, "All things are yours."

03.46. The Prophet's Directions

The Prophet’s Directions

We are next to consider Elisha’s prescription to his noble patient. He sent unto him saying, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." This was, in truth, a most unexpected and singular direction: it amazed Naaman in the greatest degree, and once more darkened his hopes of returning felicity. But who can mistake the highly typical character of this advice? Against the spiritual leprosy, sin, we can only prescribe in a similar manner: a bath, a washing, a baptism; not, however, in the waters of an earthly stream, but in that "fountain opened to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness." Here it is absolutely necessary that all polluted sinners must wash; otherwise, as saith Job, "thou shalt plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me," Job 9:31. "If I wash thee not," said the Savior to an apostle himself, "thou hast no part with me," John 13:8. Read this declaration with a threefold emphasis, and the one thing needful will be distinctly perceived. Place the accent first on the word "I;" "If I wash thee not:" Christ must do it. Wash yourself as you will, and with what you will, if Jesus wash you not, you are still unclean in the sight of God. Try the cleansing efficacy of your own supposed meritorious services; they may gain you applause before the world; but hope not for the complacency of the Most High, if you are too proud to pass under the cleansing hand of Jesus. A good name among men has its value; but if your desires extend to heaven and the world to come, then dwell seriously upon the words, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." "If I wash thee not." It matters little what Jesus may have done for you besides, unless he have washed you. You may say, "He teaches and instructs me;" but Judas Iscariot might have said the same, and yet he perished. You may even have directed others to him as the fountain for the house of David; but have you been washed in that fountain yourself? Without this you remain a sinner; and "the wages of sin is death." But wherewith, or by what means, is this washing and cleansing wrought and effected? The apostle answers this inquiry, and exclaims, "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." The church triumphant "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." To all whom God "justifieth," it is triumphantly proclaimed, "Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling!" He who heartily welcomes and holily values the sufferings of Immanuel as his only dependence and his only foundation, that person wears a vesture purified with the blood of Christ, and is free and cleansed from his foul and native leprosy. Would we enjoy such a happy condition? We then must come by faith to "the blood of sprinkling," that we may be "washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." For "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Nothing of the kind any longer cleaves to them. All the sins of their past lives are fully atoned for, made amends for, rebuked, punished, remitted; blotted out of the book of God’s remembrance, and cast into the depths of the sea, so as to be no more found; yea, all this was done in the Divine foreknowledge long before those sins were committed. And does the blood of the Lamb purify? it also furnishes goodly raiment, adorning, and honor. He who, with heart-purifying faith, receives as placed to his account the atoning sufferings of Christ, that person

is also allowed to receive and to put on, the merit of Christ's glorious obedience. And he evinces his having done this, by bearing in his changed character the Savior's image. Yes; and it is on this account we triumphantly testify, that as justification emanates from the blood of Christ, so, with equal truth, does sanctification likewise devolve through it. For, live only and entirely by true heartfelt faith in thy once-suffering, bleeding, dying Savior, and the germ of "the virtues of Him," in thy renewed nature will, by the grace and power of His spirit, Spring up, unfold, blossom, and bear fruit in thy disposition, life, and conversation. Then the love of Christ thus dying for thee will be like a precious oil to nourish and kindle up the spark of thy little love into a flame, and true humility within and without thee, will be the pledge of thy exaltation unto victory. Live, I say, by faith in that merciful, that dying love, and it will make thee merciful and forgiving, and conscientious, and patient. Thou wilt then have no relish for the vain pleasures of this world, but thou wilt have calm courage and confidence whenever trouble or death may come. "Keep," then, "the faith" we here speak of, even faith in the atoning blood of Christ; hold it fast; for the more tenaciously you abide by it, the more will you find that word of Scripture true, "the blood is the life."

Well, therefore, may the church triumphant in heaven be represented as singing the song of Moses, and of the Lamb, Revelation 15:3. For whatever they are, in moral excellence, whatever they have been enabled to do on earth in fulfilling the law, whatever they now have and enjoy in heaven, they owe it all exclusively to "Him who hath loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood." "Worthy then is the Lamb that was slain!" this is their song before the throne; they know nothing of their own merit. Yes, this is that whereby alone they received, or ever could receive, their worthiness to obtain that world; and thus it came to them, as children receive a birthright inheritance, without the least claim on the ground of their own personal desert, yet no one interposing, or daring to interpose, a protest against it. They had to pay down nothing for the purchase of it; they had only to part with their dreamy and delusive notions of self-righteousness, their pride, and their lusts. These they were willingly obliged and constrained to sacrifice to the honor and love of the truth. The whole foundation of their glorying was laid by Another, and no part of it by themselves. And this having been once laid for them, was laid for ever, as sufficient as it is everlasting. It needed no addition of man's device, nor ever will. Oh precious blood of the Lamb of God! wonderful, all-powerful, all-efficacious atonement! Let the world, if they please, tread it under foot; let those who are "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace," let them, if they will, "count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing;" it shall, nevertheless, be my strength and my song in this frail tabernacle, this house of my pilgrimage; and I will commend it while I live; I will praise the Lord for it as long as I have my being; yes, for the everlasting covenant of it, as all my salvation and all my desire. For where had I now been, if Christ had not died for me? But his atoning death swallows up my death in victory. It destroys "the body of sin" in me, which is the real "body of death," "that henceforth I should not serve sin." Thus from the blood of sprinkling I come forth "a new creature;" "a new creation." Triumphing in Christ alone, I pluck the palm of victory from the grave itself, and from the hand of hell. But who can worthily praise the Lord for this grace of atoning blood, and for its unfathomable power and efficacy! a single application of which is sufficient in a moment to make crimson sins white as snow; yea, it maketh me the righteousness of God in Him, even in Christ Jesus; and by virtue of it I become at length "blameless and harmless," "without rebuke," and "without fault before the throne of God;" yes, and raised to privileges of adoption and sonship which Adam in paradise never knew. This atonement, moreover, covers my guilty head with "a crown of life," and brings me "into the holiest at once;" it

gives life to that love which, being "made perfect," is the earnest that I shall "have boldness in the day of judgment," and shall "not be ashamed before the Lord at his coming;" but shall be welcomed to everlasting rest under his shadow "at his appearing and his kingdom." Oh invaluable and wonder-working atonement of blood! who can ever worthily praise and bless the Lord for this! Oh that I may never lose sight of it! especially in that hour, when this mortal life, and, with it, all this world to me, shall sink away in dimness and night from these dizzy and death-arrested eyes! O Thou, who art Faithful and True, grant that then, when eternity is opening to my mental sight, when its dawning brightness shall make all the guilt of my past life, all the blackness of my ingratitude, seem revived before me in more appalling vividness than ever, O then, then, yea, and now, against that day and hour let me be strong in faith, in hope, and in love! So, when I walk through "the valley of the shadow of death" shall I fear no evil. A believing view of Thee, as having, by thy death, reconciled me to God, and much more as saving me by thy life, shall command me to overcome all fear. Let then the remembrance of thy atonement by thy precious blood be ever present to my thoughts, to the belief of my heart. According to my faith, my hope, and my trust, so let its efficacy abide with me, and its presence for my every need be realized by me. Let the lintel and the side-posts of my earthly tabernacle be sprinkled and sanctified by it continually. Yea, let thy blood of atonement be sprinkled upon us all, to "purge our conscience from dead works, to serve thee the living God." Let it be upon us all, unto reconciliation and life eternal. Amen.

Chapter 96

03.47. The Way of Recovery: 2Ki_5:11-14

Chapter 13 The Way of Recovery

2 Kings 5:11-14

Speed in this wilderness is the gift of God alone. Whether He grant it, or whether he suffer the believing pilgrim to halt disconsolate on his way, the mark is at length attained. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."

"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean! Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

How interesting and instructive are these few verses! The heart of Naaman is here laid open to us. And what one thing can be more like another in all its essential features, than is "the heart of man to man?" While, therefore, we are considering the conduct of Naaman, some of us may unawares discover our own character. Naaman’s remarkable displeasure, together with the judicious and well-timed remonstrance addressed to him by his faithful servants, will form the two subjects of our present meditation. May this be accompanied with the Divine blessing! Amen.

03.48. Naaman's Displeasure

Naaman’s Displeasure

"Naaman was wroth!" In a moment he feels himself insulted by the prophet’s message to him. His thoughts seem to have been, ‘This is too much! to make so long a journey, to spare neither labor nor pains, to be put off from one to another, and at length shifted to this contemptible expedient of going and washing in Jordan seven times! Truly it was worth while to travel so far into this land of wonders for such an experiment! What do they mean? do they suppose that the captain of Syria is to be thus trifled with?’ Thus is he incensed in his splendid chariot, as though he would again grasp the sword. He is deeply mortified; he believes himself, perhaps, intentionally deceived; his reflections goad him towards despair at seeing, as he supposes, all his hopes wrecked at the very mouth of the haven. The anger of this troubled warrior is a spectacle of itself. How unreasonable was it, and how dangerous to him who indulged it! It had almost turned him away, with the whole burden of his misery, from the threshold of recovery and health. And who were the objects of this his displeasure? Perhaps not even the little Israelitish maid was excepted; for her hint had proved to him, as it now seemed, a piece of mere fatuity. And what could he think of king Jehoram, who had sanctioned his application to Elisha? Or what of the citizens of Jericho, who had confirmed him in his vain, unsubstantial hopes? But, lastly, he was angry against the prophet himself, by whom he might regard himself insulted and mocked. And yet had Naaman persisted in these proud notions, so as to have returned in anger to Damascus without a cure, there to have fallen a victim to his terrible malady, whom would he really have had to blame but himself? The rod of destruction to all his hopes would have been made up of his own pride, his own presumption, his own preconceived opinion, his carnal mind. The remedy is before him. Why does he not accept and welcome it? Simply, because it is indicated to him in a different form from the one in which he expected to meet with it.

"Behold," he says, as the chariot is turning to depart, "I thought, he would have" done this and that. But if there is one thing in the world more pernicious than another, it is oftentimes that disposition which the expression "I thought," as here used by Naaman, betrays. Our great adversary easily avails himself of the high opinion we have of our own judgment, to construct out of it the most formidable barrier between sinners and their salvation. Many have gone so far as to yield to a certain conviction that they are sinners, but, at this point, their own suppositions will begin to intervene; the sum of all which is, that they arraign the oracles of God at the bar of their own shallow reason, and judge concerning Divine truths and commandments, as they would concerning the traditions and commandments of men. But what desperate temerity is it thus to venture upon the dread ocean of futurity, in the frail and treacherous bark of fleshly understanding! Upon a mere opinion will no prudent merchant venture his capital in any speculation. He must have some reasonable certainty respecting a favorable result. And yet to risk the happiness of the soul upon the doubtful security of an opinion, how easily is this done, and how lightly accounted of by many among us, though a fearful retribution will certainly one day overtake it! Those who at present will think independently of the word of God, will have a miserable recollection of it in that

day when all their thoughts shall have "perished." It will be the misery of disappointed miscalculations. Imagine only the agony of their self-reproach, the soliloquy of their disappointment. ‘I thought it would be well with me after all. I thought that sin was not a thing of so much importance. I thought that God would forgive me. I thought that punishment in a future state was questionable: that what was believed concerning the devil was merely imaginary; and that strict notions about religion were but state contrivances. I thought that I was as likely to be right in my opinions as others in theirs; but, oh dreadful delusion! I find it now to be far otherwise, my own thoughts have fatally deceived me!’ And what was it that Naaman here thought? He had indulged narrow and haughty ideas of his own, the fallacy of which he soon experienced. "Behold," said he, "I thought, He will surely come out to me!" As if he had said, "A person of my rank does not every day stop at his door." He evidently expected deference to have been paid to his station and quality; and was chagrined at a reception which seemed to lower him down to the meanest common applicants. His high thoughts of himself encountered most unexpectedly a check and mortification; so that he at once shrunk aside with disgust into the conclusion that the prophet was destitute of power. This was a hasty conclusion indeed; hasty, indeed, and extraordinary, but not uncommon. What is the ordinary reception which a faithful preaching of the gospel meets with from the world? Is it any better than Naaman’s notions of Elisha at Jericho? The gospel, in respect of its faithful application to the conscience, knows no distinction of rank or station, of education or moral worth, but addresses itself to all, indiscriminately, as fallen children of Adam, born in sin, shapen in iniquity, unworthy of the least of God’s mercies, and at best but unprofitable servants. Thus it directs every one to depend for salvation on free grace alone. But on this very account does the world often reject and set it at nought; and why, but because their own thoughts of themselves are very different? Nevertheless, as the word of God is true, their thoughts of themselves are a perversion of all right thinking. And what else were the thoughts of this blind Syrian, who thus further expresses himself; "I thought he will stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Yes, there we have it! He had brought with him ideas, formed not from Divine truth, but from heathen falsehood; or to speak more plainly, from the natural imaginations of the corrupt heart of man. He had probably imagined that a kind of exorcism was to take place at once, by Elisha’s calling on the name of his (Elisha’s) supposed national and local god, with a solemn approach to the diseased man, and a mysterious waving of the hands over his sores and ulcers; with other such-like pomp of heathen ceremony. But now, when nothing of all this his expectation was realized, but every thing of a contrary and humiliating tendency, his hope of supernatural relief vanished at once. Like a man who thought himself imposed. on, and even insulted, he seemed to give his last hope to the winds. How pitiable was his delusion! Had he laid but his own opinions and prejudices for a moment aside, the very simplicity and absence of all show in Elisha’s procedure, would have led him to a very opposite conclusion, for it would have forced upon him the joyful conviction, "This man cannot possibly be a cloud without water; surely he must have the aid of Divine power; he is calmly confident of the issue of his message to me; he would not risk his high reputation by giving instructions so direct and unambiguous, as, ‘Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.’" But Naaman sits entrenched behind his own opinions, measuring what is Divine by an earthly standard, and little considering that what is merely human, calls for the aid of imposing circumstance and appendage, only because it is poor and insignificant in itself; while that which is Divine, being sufficiently great and important of itself, would seem more or less

deteriorated by any addition of external garniture. Yet, how many are there who still participate in the wrong sentiments of Naaman! And as they hold his sentiments, so are they involved in his fate as uncured lepers, though, alas! in a much more melancholy degree. Their unblessed opinions bedim their vision with a servile covering of worldly elements, so that they blink in the very dominions of light and truth, and "grope in darkness at noon-day." Hence it is the same to them as if there existed no word of God; for their minds are perverted by notions utterly foreign to every Divine communication, and to all the Lord’s doings as set forth in those sacred writings, for the very style and tone of which they evince a cordial disrelish. As little do they recognize the great and glorious agency of the Most High in all the features of nature and of human affairs; forsooth because nothing of what they see, in the one or in the other, accords with their own preconceived notions of Divine interposition. Thus they practically disown the God of revelation, of providence, and even of nature itself; so that their own thoughts, opinions, and sentiments, go to destroy every thing that is great, divine, and blessed in the world, and to deify, on the other hand, a philosophy or a vulgar sentiment, that is as vain and worthless, as it is exteriorly imposing and plausible.

Therefore must all who would persuade themselves that they "have chosen the way of truth," be ever jealous of any imagination or opinion that tends to flatter the pride, vanity, or indolence, of our fallen nature. Preconceived opinion, as, for instance, respecting the humble manner in which the Christian revelation was first ushered into the world, is the nurse and mother of infidelity. The corrupt inclinations and self-flattering prejudices of mankind form the very pillars of Satan’s empire. By their means it is that he governs the world; while wherever men begin to question the infallibility of their own conceptions, there is his kingdom shaken. And if we proceed a little further, so as to become convinced, that the manner in which God should reveal himself to his sinful creatures, can be learned only from Himself, we are not far from the kingdom of God. For those who inherit that kingdom are of childlike docility; neither do they presume to understand before they have been instructed. But there are multitudes in our day, who deny truth to be truth, because they have determined what is truth, before they have become acquainted with it.

03.49. The Servant's Protest

The Servant’s Protest

Naaman’s unexpected reception from Elisha was not the only, nor the chief cause of his extreme vexation. The unpromising appearance of the remedy which the prophet had prescribed, had still more to do with it. Elisha had bidden him, "Go, and wash in Jordan." "In Jordan!" thought the indignant captain: "are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?" And, indeed, we must admit that he was right, if the two rivers he refers to were to be regarded in the same light in which he regarded them. For to this day are the waters of Syria esteemed more wholesome and strengthening than most of those in the promised land. But who had bidden the stranger to compare the physical properties of Jordan with those of the rivers of Damascus? He did not reflect, that in his favor, on that occasion, there was a Divine promise attached to the waters of Jordan. The assurance had been given him in the name of the Almighty, that by this water he should be cured of his leprosy; therefore a healing power had been, for the present case, imparted to it, surpassing all the physical powers of other waters. Yea, it stands to reason that the special blessing of God can render the meanest appointments the most salutary; a barley-loaf better than a sumptuous entertainment; a shepherd’s rod in the hand of Moses more powerful than an imperial scepter; and any condition of poverty superior to the greatest abundance. What were all the medicines in the world compared with the brazen serpent in the wilderness, after the Lord had said, "He that looketh upon it shall live!" What the largest possessions of corn, wine, and oil, in comparison with the widow’s handful of meal in a barrel, and a little remnant of oil in a cruse, after the Lord had pronounced concerning these, "They shall not waste nor fail!" Verily, the worth of everything depends upon its being associated with the Divine blessing. The scanty pittance and the hard couch of God’s poorest children are infinitely preferable to the fine linen and sumptuous fare of those, who, not seeking in the first place the kingdom of God and His righteousness, have no Divine promise recorded in their favor, that all needful earthly things shall be added unto them.

"Judge not," then, like Naaman, "after the outward appearance." He considered the water of Jordan simply as the water of Jordan, without reflecting on that Divine blessing which, like the angel at Bethesda, would descend upon it. Hence to wash in that river appeared too simple an operation to warrant any hope of essential benefit. Had Elisha commanded something uncommon or ceremonious and difficult, this would have raised the warrior’s hopes. But the simplicity of such a prescription, so widely different from his own ways of thinking, seemed to leave him no prospect but that of a miserable death. He therefore indignantly orders his charioteer to drive off: "he turned and went away in a rage." Impatient of delay for any further inquiry, he will have his orders instantly obeyed, his servants mounted on their camels, and his whole train on the march. But do we not feel as though we could have seized the bridles of the horses, and have closed the gates of Jericho to prevent the departure of this deluded stranger? Should we not have shed tears of compassion at beholding the unhappy man turning away from the very door of mercy, and ready to carry home to a death-bed his burden of loathsome disease and wretchedness? With such a

burden he would certainly have returned as he came, had not the providence of God mercifully interposed, to rescue him from the delusive imaginations of pride and prejudice. And this is just what the great Author and Finisher of our faith has done for recovering many a proud person from the leprosy of sin. And how necessary have such interpositions been! The bare consciousness that we have the leprosy of sin, or even the superadded wish for recovery, is insufficient of itself to persuade us heartily to accept the appropriate and Divinely appointed remedy. In the very sight of the manger and the cross, if left to ourselves, we should still turn aside, and in the darkness of some self-flattering way of our own, we should miserably perish.

Naaman, if he would be cured, must be disabused of his own proud delusions: the mighty captain and counsellor of Syria must listen to humble and humbling advice. Now, observe how beautifully God’s providence wrought for the accomplishment of this merciful purpose. He suffered him previously to discover the evil passions of his own proud spirit, to make him sensible that this, as well as his body, needed a cleansing from Jehovah. Nor does he miraculously prevent him from actually commencing his return homewards, but leaves him to act according to his own free will. There was something also humiliating in God’s choosing as the further instruments of his merciful intentions towards Naaman, the inferiors and servants of this great man. He had already moved off from the humble dwelling of Elisha, who probably remained quietly in his prophet’s chamber, imploring that the eyes of the infatuated man might be opened; when some of Naaman’s attendants, who viewed the matter with more simplicity of mind, came up, and accosted their master in his chariot, and with equal respect and earnestness entreated him to comply with the directions of the prophet, and at least to try the prescribed remedy. From their apparently familiar and affectionate address, "My father!" (though it may have been only an Eastern compliment), we may not unreasonably conclude that Naaman was an affable and benevolent master. Certain it is, that many are affable and benevolent in their ordinary conduct, still a proposition is made to them of similar import to that, "Go, wash in Jordan, and be clean;" and then, alas! how soon will what appeared to be a lamb be heard to speak as a dragon! Should, however, the result be more favorable, it is a pleasing sign of the influence of Divine grace. And doubtless it is only under such influence, that the "Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness" will be cordially and thankfully resorted to.

We may observe in the words of Naaman’s servants the beautiful simplicity of good common sense. "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean!" Truly, they were right. Had Elisha prescribed the achievement of something great or extraordinary, though it were a pilgrimage through the Arabian Desert, or to the top of some lofty mountain, or a fast of many days, or a costly sacrifice, how buoyant had been Naaman’s hopes, and how ready his compliance! But to wash in Jordan, and this seven times, appeared to him so perfectly futile, that he could not imagine any healing, much less that of the incurable leprosy, attainable by so insignificant and unmeaning a ceremony. The reasoning of Naaman’s servants will admit of further consideration for Christian use. How difficult do men find it implicitly to acquiesce in the gracious liberality of the New Testament economy! The very facility with which the blessings of the Christian covenant may be attained, becomes an offence. To be thrown entirely upon a single resource, "the simplicity which is in Christ," is a matter of stumbling to the pride of human nature. Hence the necessity of constantly watching to stand fast in the faith of that great truth which serves to

sustain, purify, and animate the very life of all Christian obedience; namely, that "by grace ye are saved, through faith;" that by the grace of God we are what we are; and that the propitiation of Christ, the Son of God, who freely laid down his life for us, is the everlasting basis of all spiritual healing and reconciliation. The invitation of the gospel therefore is, "Come and purchase, without money and without price!" Thus the way of faith is one of humiliation and self-abasement from beginning to end, and "eternal life is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord," For "whosoever will," behold "all things are ready," and "let him take the water of life freely." Here is Mary's "chosen" and "good part" without Martha's "cumbrance and trouble about many things." Choose the same then, dear brethren, for yourselves! Walk not after the imagination of your own hearts, which will certainly deceive and disappoint you at last, as many have experienced already. Be willing to go into total poverty of spirit; for to this is attached the healing and satisfying blessing of the kingdom of heaven. In the way of our own preferences we may imagine ourselves free, but we are here in the very worst state of slavery; we may imagine ourselves honorably employed, but we are bringing forth fruit unto death; we may believe that we are keeping all the commandments of God's law, while it has undoubtedly many things against us, which if not timely remitted by the only method wherein we are authorized to expect it, will amount to its awful curse, and to our final rejection. If, on the other hand, for Christ's sake, we renounce and let go at once our own imaginary glory, then we acquire, in its stead, a glory that fadeth not away. If we deny every false claim of self, and "yield ourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God," having His will for our will, and His glory for our only glory, then indeed we are counted as the children of the King; yea, as one with him. Spend not then any longer your "money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not;" but hearken diligently to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and feed upon that which is good; yea, "let your soul delight itself" in its abundance, and shine in the garments of salvation and robe of righteousness prepared for you by the King of the freely-invited guests. Here is the Divine blessing; here is the love of God; here is the kingdom of heaven opened, through the precious death of Christ, to all believers. "Blessed are they that practise his commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are—whosoever loveth and practiseth untruth."

Turn, therefore, to this "Stronghold, ye prisoners of hope," all ye who value your immortal souls. Be enslaved no longer to any self-flattering imaginations of your own. Truly in vain is salvation hoped from the multitude of such hills! Come, and receive it as a free gift from the hands of Divine mercy, which "giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not," and which expects nothing in return, except the grateful love and reasonable service of a devotedly obedient heart and life.

03.50. The Cure: 2Ki_5:14-15

Chapter 14 The Cure

2 Kings 5:14-15

"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick! I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance!" Thus spake our blessed Lord to the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. If He is the Good Physician, who is found among the sick, why does He seek them, except to heal them? If He is the Friend of publicans and sinners, for what purpose is it but to call them to repentance, and to separate them from sin for ever? He came into the world to save sinners, and every miracle of mercy that he wrought, showed that his design was, that sinners might be saved; that is, not only pardoned, but transformed into new creatures by the renewing of their mind, so as to become devoted to God. Pardoning grace is always sanctifying grace. Of such things we shall be at least reminded in this concluding portion of Naaman’s history.

"Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company." The narrative now takes a favorable turn, and Naaman obtains the object of his wishes. Let us praise God for it; for we should have regretted to this day had the leper returned uncured, when an effectual remedy had been Divinely pointed out to him. And yet he had very nearly foregone the benefit of it; so destructively may any one stand in his own light, when he presumes to judge of Divine things by his own imagination; and arbitrarily undertakes to determine how the finger of God shall be recognized. Let us now observe how the Syrian was first cured of his folly, and then of his disease.

sermon index

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net