

Vessels of Wrath

by Thomas Bradbury

Thomas Bradbury's sermon 'Vessels of Wrath' explores the sovereignty of God and the implications of His divine authority over creation and the fate of humanity.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:4

Topics: "Sovereignty Of God", "Divine Mercy"

Description

Thomas Bradbury preaches about the sovereignty of Jehovah in choosing vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy, highlighting the contrast between those fitted for destruction and those prepared for glory. He emphasizes the need for God's revelation and the riches of His glory in the lives of His chosen ones, who are vessels of mercy called from both Jews and Gentiles. Through examples like Manasseh, Mary Magdalene, and the Corinthians, Bradbury illustrates God's mercy and grace in transforming the vilest sinners into vessels of honor, prepared unto eternal glory through the work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

"What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." (Romans 9:22)

We have been singing most glorious truths. How many of us have the happy consciousness and sweet assurance that we have sung with the spirit and with the understanding, those precious words of the redeemed Atheist:

"Up to my Father's high decree

Each act in time I trace;

Up to the glorious sovereign Three

Almighty Fount of grace?"

I have asked you the question; but may God of His infinite mercy and goodness, by the grace and indwelling of His blessed Spirit, answer it for you. It is one thing to sing the sweet effusions which once flowed from the exercised hearts of those eternally-loved ones who are now basking in light and sunshine in the presence of Him who loved them to the end of all their sins and sorrows, and who once mourned

because they could not love Him more, but it is another thing altogether to look God in the face with the Spirit-wrought assurance that the language we sing is the honest expression of the experience of our hearts. Just think, for a moment or two, what have been the strange scenes we have witnessed during the past week, the perplexing paths we have trod, the puzzling points in God's providence against which our fleshly natures have murmured and rebelled; ay, it may be that this very morning blighted hopes, cankering cares, and worrying anxieties are telling their sad tale in some of your minds, and Satan is calling into question the love, care, kindness, and concern of your covenant God and Father. With such experiences and under such painful exercises, can you sing,

"Up to my Father's high decree

Each act in time I trace?"

If you can with a feeling, intelligent heart, God is very good to you. Being "rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved you," (Eph. 2:4) He has come down to the deepest depths of your need, infirmity, ignorance, and sin, and has given you a gracious lift up to the heights of His covenant, into blessed association and sweet oneness with His mind and will as revealed in this blessed Book.

It may be that some within these walls at this time are suffering the pangs of painful bereavement. Last Sunday morning there was one poor fellow here who earned his daily bread at the Anchor Brewery, Southwark. He listened to the discourse upon the words, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the One will lift up His fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth: for he hath not another to help him up." (Eccles. 4:9,10) He returned home from chapel, and spent the greater part of the day conversing with his wife upon the truths he had heard. On Monday morning he went to his employment, and was sent with two others to put up a large signboard on the top of a public-house in Paddington. While thus occupied, a brick balustrade upon which he was standing gave way, when, with another, he fell to the pavement, and both were killed. He is gone! Where? It is not for us to say, but our God knows where. Yet, the very fact of his attending Grove Chapel, sitting under the sound of God's glorious Gospel flowing from this exercised heart of mine a Gospel revealing JEHOVAH'S sovereignty from first to last a Gospel untainted with fleshly free-will a Gospel without trimming or toning down to suit the taste of poor perishing mortals a Gospel all Yea and Amen a Gospel revealing a covenant, providing, and protecting Father a Gospel proclaiming the compassion and unceasing love of Jesus, the tender-hearted Saviour and Husband of His Church a Gospel which honours the Holy Ghost as the Accomplisher of the Father's will in the hearts of His elect and redeemed people, according to that last verse we sang before the sermon:

"And Thou, eternal Spirit vast

What love can Thine transcend?

Since Thou Thy lot with me hath cast.

Indwelling God and Friend"

a Gospel which gives all the honour and glory of our soul's salvation to the covenant Three-in-One a Gospel with power bringing poor sinners to the feet and to the heart of King Emmanuel crowning Him Lord of all the very fact of the poor fellow being found regularly within these walls, animates and cheers our hearts with the hope that a gracious Saviour has carried him up far away from toil, trial, and temptation, to

that blessed land where eternal glories rise before the enraptured vision of all those who, through electing and redeeming love, stand before the throne praising and adoring the slain Lamb for ever and for ever.

It is ours this morning, and it is a glorious privilege, to listen to the creature-humbling, Christ-exalting, and God-glorifying truths as given by the Holy Ghost through the pen of His servant Paul; for you may depend upon this, it is not in every church or chapel where this 9th chapter of the epistle to the Romans can be heard in the hearing of the people. There are some places where the 9th, 10th and 11th chapters of this epistle have been torn out of the pulpit Bible, thus giving evidence of the devilish enmity of Protestant praters against the sovereignty of Israel's covenant God. This reminds me of an aged servant of God telling me of a place of worship he visited where these three chapters were pasted together. Well, thank God, they are neither torn out nor pasted together here. Yes, and let me tell you, you have one here whose almost constant cry is, that the Spirit of wisdom and revelation may throw still clearer light upon these glorious truths, bring up from the depths of Divine revelation, and bring down from the heights of the covenant, brighter views and clearer apprehensions of JEHOVAH'S sovereign, independent, immutable, and absolute rule over all things in heaven and in earth. May it be ours, then, as graciously guided by the Spirit, to look at Him whom He loves to glorify. For, mark you, the living child of God does not desire simply to know the meaning of a text, or to listen to the effusions of the preacher, however learned, eloquent, or experimental he may be; but his desire is to see God, know God, and enjoy God in any portion that may be read, or in any truth that may be expounded or opened up.

Blessed Spirit, do Thou bless us with Thy gracious indwelling and guidance, that we may look with the eye of faith, the eye of an enlightened understanding, the eye of fond affection upon Him whom our souls truly love and before whom our spirits bow in true humility, confessing, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, and though I have denied Thee, wandered from Thee, and been ashamed of Thee, yet Thou, knowest that I do love Thee." Ah! My dear friends, what a mercy it is for us to know that in the face of all our coldness, deadness, unbelief, and accursed indifference, He rests in His love, and breathes His own words of sweet encouragement into our anxious ears: "I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal. 3:6)

Let us look at the text: "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF JEHOVAH set forth in His absolute authority over all things in heaven, in earth, and in hell; over all angels, men, beasts, and devils; over all events, circumstances, and influences; and over all feelings, frames, and fancies.

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF JEHOVAH, as set forth in the creation of all things, especially "the vessels of wrath."

III. THE VESSELS OF WRATH who they are, and how they are fitted to destruction.

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF JEHOVAH set forth in His absolute authority over all in heaven, in earth, in hell. What do you think about that? Well, if your ears have been circumcised, if your hearts have been humbled, and your spirits have been chastened before God, if you have been melted and molded according to the gracious design of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, your hearts will vibrate and quiver with solemn acquiescence in this glorious salvation. We see and acknowledge this truth in the very existence of the great and glorious Jehovah. Before creation's dawn He dwelt amid the silences of eternity independently of any created being for the accomplishment of His will,

or for the perfecting of His eternal purposes. If you wish for a poetic exposition, or opening up of this glorious truth, let me ask you to read the first hymn in dear old Joseph Irons' hymn book, and there you will learn what kind of a God he worshipped:

"Aspire, my soul, to yonder throne,
Where sits the Infinite Unknown,
The self-existent God;
Whose being no beginning knows,
While matchless splendour round Him flows,
And all things wait His nod."

As you read such glorious truths, your hearts must thrill with grateful adoration for such an effusion showing forth the fact that all things exist and are at the beck and bidding of Israel's covenant God. Turn from poetic effusions to the positive declaration of God's mind in His own blessed Word, and what find you there? Himself revealed in His glorious sovereignty, existing and acting according to His absolute right. You see this also flowing from the experiences of those in gracious union with Him. Turn to 1 Chron. 29:10-12: "Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation; and David said, Blessed be Thou, Lord God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine: Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as Head over all. Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all: and in Thine hand is power and might, and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name." In that precious book of Psalms glorious sovereignty shines forth in almost every portion. See Ps. 115:3: "But our God is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Again, in Ps. 135:5-7: "For I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth" naturally, as we oftimes see with our eyes. Spiritually, only known by those who have passed from death unto life and mourn over the fogs and vapours of indwelling corruption. These are the ends of the earth, God's tried and tempted children. "He maketh lightnings for the rain." As the lightning separates and divides the murky storm clouds, and makes a way for the rain to descend upon the earth, so, in our spiritual experience, He makes a way by His power for that gracious rain wherewith He refreshes His inheritance when it is weary. "He bringeth the wind out of His treasures."

Do you wish for still further revelation of this glorious doctrine? Turn to Daniel 4:34-37: "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?"

Then listen to Nebuchadnezzar's ascription of praise to that great and glorious Being whom he saw and knew as the sovereign Ruler of his destiny. "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to

abase." Mark that! His works in heaven, His works on earth, His works in the seas, His works in all deep places, therefore, His works in hell, are all in truth and righteousness.

Have we sufficient proof in these Scriptures? No, for God has revealed still more of His glorious sovereignty. Turn to Proverbs 16:1-9 and 33: "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. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Look at Prov. 21:30,31: "There is no wisdom nor understanding or counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety, or victory, is of the Lord."

In these Scriptures we see Jehovah's sovereignty over all things. Elect and reprobate angels perform His bidding. Elect ones ministered to Daniel and Peter. (See Dan. 9:21; Acts 12:7) Evil angels can only act according to His beck. (See 1 Kings 22:21-23; Ezek. 14:9) Look at the words and actions of men. Does Shimei curse? David says, "The Lord hath bidden him." (2 Samuel 16:11) Does Pilate assert his power over Jesus? "Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above." (John 19:10,11) Notice the movements and instincts of beasts.

Frogs, flies, lice, and beasts move at His command in judgment upon the Egyptians, (Exodus 8-10) Bears and lions go forth at His bidding to devour the adversaries of His people. (2 Kings 2:24; Dan. 6:24) Our God asserts His sovereignty and the inferior creation display supernatural powers. An ass with man's voice reproves a mad prophet. (Num. 22:28) To minister to the necessities of a saint, one raven is commissioned to act the part of butcher, while another performs the office of baker. (1 Kings 17:6) A great fish affords a friendly shelter to rebellious Jonah. (Jonah 1:17) And a cock crows conviction to the heart of poor Peter. (Matt. 26:74,75) Devils dread His approach, and are subject to His command.

The arch-enemy could not touch Job without Jehovah's leave. (Job 1:11) The legion in the mad Gadarene left him at the word of Jesus, and were compelled to obtain sufferance from Him to enter into the herd of swine. (Matt. 8:28-34) Over all events, circumstances, influences, feelings, frames, and fancies He rules with unerring wisdom.

"Tis His to fill immensity;

No object can escape His eye,

Nor thought His mind elude;

All things were by His wisdom plann'd;

All are supported by His hand,

And all at once are viewed."

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF JEHOVAH, as set forth in the creation of all things, especially "the vessels of wrath." Solomon tells us, "The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." (Prov. 16:4) Look at Rev. 4:11 "Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." God has created all things according to the counsel of His own will, for the display of His absolute sovereignty over all things in infinite space.

Objectors to this revelation of Jehovah's character abound on every hand. Thousands of would-be-wise philosophers reject the plain statements of eternal truth, and insist that there are some things exempt from the all things God has created. Can such an objection be true? I answer, No. Who are we to believe God or man? "Let God be true, but every man a liar." (Rom. 3:4) You may see the truth of the subject in many portions of God's blessed Word. You remember the case recorded in Gen. 30:1,2: "And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel." I look upon Jacob's anger in this case as an illustration of the injunction in Eph. 4:26: "Be ye angry, and sin not." "And he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" Mark! To the pure, all things are pure, and to the mind sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and chastened by Divine discipline, a necessity will exist for such narrations as these; and when seen in God's light, no fault will be found with those who make chaste allusions to them for instruction and edification.

Now turn with me to Exod. 4:10,11 "And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" This is God's own declaration; so whatever infirmity in mind or body, mental or physical, a poor child of God may be groaning under, he will be taught, sooner or later, to trace the origin of the same up to the "Great First Cause of all events."

Art thou a poor limper along life's rugged pathway? Who made the lame? "Have not I, the Lord?" Art thou defective in thy vision? Who made the blind? "Have not I, the Lord?" Art thou unable to express thyself as thou wouldest wish? Who made the dumb? "Have not I, the Lord?" Art thou suffering from that irksome infliction, deafness? Who maketh the deaf? "Have not I, the Lord?" Now look for a moment at that plain and explicit declaration in Deut. 32:39 "See, now, that I, even I, am He, and there is no God with Me; I kill, and make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand."

Now turn to that sublime song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:6-10) "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them." Here we see that God is the Creator and Preserver of all things for His own glory and honour.

In the contemplation of a theme so vast and so glorious, Paul might well cry out, "O, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36) We now are brought to consider the awful and heart-searching declaration,

III. THE VESSELS OF WRATH who they are, and how they are fitted to destruction. The truth contained in these terrific words is hated and despised where the doctrine of election is tolerated. Yes, I say tolerated, because there are many who think and speak as though a sovereign God were obligated to them for their bare notice of the glorious doctrine of election. But I pity from my very heart the preacher it matters not

what his position or acquirements may be who will keep back any truth of God's Word for the purpose of accommodating his message to any portion of his hearers. Let the testimony be with a "Thus saith the Lord," or, "It is written;" and what the Lord has said or written may I never be ashamed to declare. If God's Word reveals His mind concerning His electing a people in Christ Jesus before the worlds were framed, and has created them for the display of His own glory, and if the necessary consequence attending this marvellous, this glorious, and God-like transaction is that He has eternally reprobated others by leaving them outside the bounds of His grace, by not writing their names in the Lamb's book of life, by not redeeming them with precious blood, by not regenerating them unto life, by not bringing them into the enjoyment of His love: I say, if this be a certain consequence of God's election of a people to grace and glory, I envy not the man who dares to wrap up or hold back that which God has so clearly revealed. It is mine, however, to stand upon the glorious vantage ground of His distinguishing and discriminating truth, and declare it, though I might be forsaken of all men, knowing that a covenant-keeping God will stand by me. The "little while" of my existence here will soon be past, and my poor stammering tongue will lie silent in death; but my hope is, that my ransomed spirit will then have the approval and smile of my God, in His words of loving welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord." Good, in the goodness of my Saviour, Faithful, in the faithfulness of His own giving. A servant, by His own rich and sovereign grace.

In our investigation of this deep and momentous subject, we will look at the preceding context. In it the apostle Paul declares the sovereignty of Jehovah in His choice and rejection of whom He would, without going out of Himself for a reason in so acting. Paul instances the children of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac was God's eternally-loved one, God's elect, the child of promise. Ishmael! Where was he? Look at him in the light of the exercises of his father Abraham's heart. Abraham bows with profound reverence before his God who had created all things for Himself and saw Isaac elect, but Ishmael reprobate. Sons of the same parents, possessing the same outward privileges, having the same advantages, and remembered before the throne in the same prayers. When God communed with Abraham, and communicated to him the fact that Isaac should be born, and through him the spiritual promises should flow to the Church in all succeeding generations, Abraham's fatherly affection went out toward his other lad, and he cried, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" Have we any fathers here this morning who have children, giving no evidence whatever of oneness with a covenant God in Christ, who possess not broken hearts and contrite spirits, who manifest no desire for an acquaintance with their father's God? If so, surely this plaintive prayer of Abraham will find a soft place in the affections of your heart. But mark! The prayers and tears of Abraham for the spiritual good of his child could not alter Jehovah's purpose, or divert Him from the perfect and exact accomplishment of that plan of grace and glory which He arranged and fixed in the Son of His love before all worlds. Paul concludes his argument respecting Isaac and Ishmael thus "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son." (Rom. 9:7-9; Gen. 17:18-21)

Sovereignty is also revealed in the choice of Jacob and the rejection of Esau. "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac: for the children being not yet born, neither having done good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth." I cannot stand this, says the fanciful philosopher, and the flimsy philanthropist. Who asks such to stand it? I do not, and surely you cannot think that a sovereign God would be obligated to you for doing so? But see! "It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written (Mal. 1:2,3,) Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then, Is there unrighteousness with God?

God forbid." Now Paul turns to that remarkable conversation when God spake to Moses as a man speaketh to his friend, recorded in Exo. 33:19: "For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion. Paul then states his conclusion of the whole matter: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." He then points to Pharaoh as an illustration of God's reprobating right and power, and meets the objector with his own objections, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? This is as much as to say, Why doth God find fault if He has created some for eternal glory and shut others up to eternal reprobation. How does Paul answer this? Will he argue out the point with the objector? No. But he will assert God's right to create and dispose of His creatures according to His sovereign will, and communicate to whom He will His mind and intention toward them. God reveals His mind in his Word, and, "Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed." (Prov. 13:13) What does the Word say concerning Pharaoh? "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." He "overthrew Pharaoh, and his host in the Red Sea: for His mercy endureth for ever." (Ps. 136:15) Strange mercy that! It was mercy, not to Pharaoh, but to the people of God whom He persecuted and despised. Paul deigns not to dispute with objectors, but ignores their right to dispute with God. See! "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou then make me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?" Jehovah has an undisputed right to take of the same piece of earth and make one vessel in whom He will display the riches of His grace, and another in whom He will display the fierceness of His wrath.

You have this stated in 2 Tim. 2:19,20: "Nevertheless the foundation of the Lord 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. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." One elected to eternal life, another left reprobate unto eternal death. Carnal reason objects, and neither can nor will believe these glorious truths; but may God in the riches of His grace open them up more and more to our waiting hearts. "What saith the Scripture?" Turn to 1 Thess. 5:9: "For God hath not appointed us (the beloved of God and elect) to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Come with me to 1 Pet. 2:8: "And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed." Now turn over to the epistle of Jude, 4th verse: "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation." But mark well that tremendous and sweeping declaration concerning the reprobate in 2 Pet. 2:12: "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption." "Vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." "Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places; Thou castedst them down to destruction." (Ps. 73:18)

But look at the text: "What if God, willing to show His wrath." The purpose and will of God in the existence of the reprobate is to show His wrath against sin. Had these never lived, the glory of His righteousness would never have been displayed. "And to make His power known." The word "power" in the preceding verse means, "right according to justice;" but here it denotes His ability and determination to make sin, which in its open nature is to God's dishonour, glorify His name. "He endured with much longsuffering." This is a remarkable expression. We have seen persons born into the world with malicious inclinations and devilish determinations, running greedily in the way of sin, debauchery, profanity, and cruelty, and at last drop into hell with all their imperfections on their hands, ay, and we have been so short-sighted as to think

it would have been better if God had taken them away in their infancy. I know one who lay upon his mother's lap, apparently a dying babe. The breaking heart of the mother begged for the life of her boy. God gave her her request, but she lived to groan over the perversity of her child, and to repent of the prayers she breathed for his life. We may wonder why God does not cut off and destroy at once these demons and dogs in human shape; but he endures their existence to display, in a manner best known to Himself, the glory of His great name.

"The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Every vessel of wrath must fill up the measure of its iniquity, transgression, and enmity against God, and thus manifest its fitness for destruction, whereby God reveals His justice in the condemnation of all out of the Son of His love, on the ground of their own dispositions and sins. See Col. 3:6: "For which thing's sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." In this marvellous chapter we see revealed the sovereignty of Jehovah as He rules over all things in heaven, and earth, and hell, for His own glory, for the good of His chosen, for the display of the harmony of all His attributes, and for the revelation of the mysteries of His grace in the objects of His eternal love and choice, a people whom He will have near to Himself through a long eternity.

Search the Scriptures, and as you search them you see this appalling subject appearing in every book. Come to Gen. 3:15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." There you see two seeds, the loved and the hated, the elect and the reprobate, the redeemed and the unredeemed, the regenerate and the unregenerate, vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath, those afore-prepared unto glory and those fitted to destruction, the children of God and the children of the devil. In the first two born into this world we see this exemplified. Cain was a vessel of wrath, Abel was a vessel of mercy. See 1 John 3:12: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." We see this also in Pharaoh. See Exod. 9:15,16: "For now I will stretch out My hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power, and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth." Look at Balaam! The Spirit of the Lord was in his mouth. The devil and the world had full possession of his heart. He "loved the wages of unrighteousness," and at last fell fighting against Israel with the enemies of the Lord, and went to his own place. Look at the false prophets in Israel. "And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived the prophet, and I will stretch out My hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel." (Ezek. 14:9) Look at Judas! Awful character! "And truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined; but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22) Turn to Acts 4:27,28: "For of a truth against Thy holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy counsel determined before to be done." Reprobates are appointed to do their own work, and when they have performed it, their wages are always ready for them. "For the wages of sin is death," due to all the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; but "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" to all the vessels of mercy which Jehovah had afore prepared unto glory.

Here we are this morning enjoying the privileges of worship and the preaching of God's pure Word; but what are we in the presence of the great Searcher of hearts? Either vessels of wrath filled with enmity against God because of the revelation of His wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, or we are vessels of mercy waiting to receive mercy from the hands of our covenant God, which mercy in experimental possession is a blessed foretaste of that glory unto which He has afore prepared us.

VESSELS OF MERCY

"And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory,

Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:23,24)

Last Sunday morning I directed your attention to the subject of the sovereignty of Jehovah as stated in the words of the preceding verse. That verse contains a startling fact, at which the proud, yet puny, mind of man kicks and rebels, although it is to be found throughout the whole range of Divine revelation. The enlightened understanding, contemplating Jehovah in covenant creation or communication, admires His glorious sovereignty, and beholds it on every hand in His wonderful working providence. The creatures who were called into existence by His word of power had no hand, voice, or choice in their creation. They were not consulted as to the particular spots they should occupy, neither had they a voice in the choice of the comforts or miseries, prosperity or adversity, success or failure, they experience. All these were settled by His infinite and unerring wisdom. The living child of God is taught to acknowledge this in all the events of life, and in all surrounding circumstances and influences. We see it demonstrated in the foolish efforts of man to make human nature something different to that which God declares it to be in His blessed Book, and in the foolish efforts of deluded visionaries to make this earth a second paradise, to do away with all contention and strife, to sheath the sword for ever, and cause bloodshed and slaughter to cease in this sinful world. All these attempts we see to be utterly futile, and the greater the attempt, the more miserable the failure. The greater the pretensions to universal peace, the greater the sound of the clash of arms. The voice of God to His people concerning this world is, "Arise, ye, and depart; for this is not your rest." (Micah 2:10)

But we rejoice to see, and know, and feel the truth of Divine sovereignty as opened up in the pages of Divine revelation. In the verse preceding my text we see the manifestation of His power over all those apart from the Son of His love, and His disposing of them according to His unerring wisdom without any lack of justice or righteousness. These persons are designated "vessels of wrath." Last Sunday morning I endeavoured to describe several of these dreadful characters, such as Cain, Pharaoh, Balaam, Judas. These all performed the work they were appointed to, and all received the reward due to them destruction. They did their duty, and the produce of their duty was unprofitableness to them, ay, the end of duty is, to those who trust in it, damnation. Do not think I have the faintest desire to gloat upon a theme so awful as this is to me. My natural proclivities would lead me from it altogether, and make me to appear more amiable than God Himself. Yes, I would lay aside, or wrap up such painful, yet profitable, revelations, but I cannot, I am here this morning, just the same as when I first stood before you, to declare that which my God by the power of the Holy Ghost brings home to my understanding and affections, in which He gives me a gracious interest, and by which He brings me into blessed and hallowed association with Himself. In dwelling upon the theme of the 22nd verse we derive no comfort or consolation but by way of contrast. This we see in these 22nd and 23rd verses. Look at the contrasts! Vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy. God making known the power of His wrath, and making known the riches of His glory. Some persons fitted to destruction, others afore prepared unto glory. Has He endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction? By way of contrast we see Him enduring with much long-suffering ourselves who bear the marks and evidences of vessels of mercy afore prepared unto glory. Think how He has borne with our manners these many years in the wilderness. Like a nurse beareth or feedeth her child, so the Lord graciously bears His wayward children, and brings them to the very spot where He unfolds to them the love of His heart, the bounties of His house, and leads them to know what that means which I cannot repeat to you too often, but often sing in the solemnities of my soul and in the rejoicings of my spirit

before Him:

"Determined to save, He watch'd o'er my path,

When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death.

And can He have taught me to trust in His name,

And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?"

And according to that precious declaration of dear old John Kent's,

"Preserved in Jesus when

My feet make haste to hell;

And there should I have gone,

But Thou dost all things well;

Thy love was great, Thy mercy free,

Which from the pit delivered me."

Merciful deliverance! Gracious preservation! Covenant care! Unceasing concern!

It is ours, in humble dependence upon the guidance and grace of God the ever-blessed Spirit, to seek a little instruction and consolation from the words I have read as my text. We will notice

I. GOD'S REVELATION "And that He might make known."

II. GOD'S RICHES "The riches of His glory."

III. GOD'S RESERVE "THE VESSELS OF MERCY."

IV. GOD'S REGARD for them "Which He had afore prepared unto glory."

I. GOD'S REVELATION "And that He might make known." Without this revelation, all is darkness, ignorance, and error. The mind of God is to have in association and identification with Himself a people eternally loved, but who fell in Adam from their state of earthly excellency and perfection into sin, suffering, and sorrow. These He determined to save by His rich and distinguishing grace, through the blood and righteousness of Jesus, quicken them into spiritual life by His blessed Spirit, and bring them to experience and enjoy that expressed in 1 John 1:3: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Yes, He will have all His elect people in blessed, hallowed, spiritual, and heavenly association and fellowship with Himself. His goings forth in covenant, creation, and communication are to this end: "That He might make known the riches of His glory in the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." He wills to have His own in association, communication, and communion with Himself. He will cause all His works to praise Him and His saints to bless Him; (Ps. 145:10) and although the devil with his priests and prophets have done their utmost to conceal Him from His people, yet He cannot be hid. (Mark 7:24) He has devised means whereby His banished ones shall not be eternally expelled from Him, and will

proclaim unto them: "I am a God at hand and not a God afar off." (Jer. 23:23) Our God is a sociable God.

In the creation of man, after the bringing forth of all the lower creation, He said, "Let us make man in our image." In this Divine and glorious "US" the eye of faith discovers Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in consultation and communication concerning the creation of man. This creation was in the image, pattern, or design after which the second Person should come forth in incarnation from the womb of Mary, to work out the eternal salvation of all those in union with Him. But mankind in the Adam fall became so debased, depraved, and degraded, as to render it utterly impossible for any mortal by his own natural strength or will to turn to God to seek His counsel or His company.

Man seek God? The very opposite is the case. Instead of seeking Him, he wanders away from Him as far as his truant feet can take him. We see this illustrated in Gen. 3. Man hiding himself as far away from God as he could possibly get; but God seeking him and determined not to leave him because of His own elect who were then in his loins. Man hiding! God seeking! Satan deceiving! God delivering! Look at that 15th verse: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

There we see God saving from destruction those whom He loved and sought, who desired not God, looked not for God, and who imagined they could do very well without Him. Of almost universal man, religious and irreligious, it may be said, "They seek not God." And it is astonishing to notice where some, who profess the glorious truths of Divine sovereignty, are going to. I have been reading certain suggestions concerning the island of Cyprus, which has been brought under the protectorate of this kingdom.

This Christian country under the sway of our Protestant Queen is to forestall the Ritualistic idolaters who intend propagating their pernicious errors in that island, by the Church Missionary Society! What kind of a Gospel is that? Certainly it is not Popery in full bloom, neither is it Ritualism, which is Popery in the bud; but it is Arminianism, which is Popery in the root. When you come across a Church Missionary Society's agent who preaches free-grace without free-will, sovereign love without Satan's lie, tell me, and I will gladly go and hear him. All the missionary societies have set up the accursed idol,

FREE-WILL TO DO GOOD;

and wherever you go, you may hear its bold defiance of JEHOVAH'S sovereignty, and its calling into question JEHOVAH'S right to do as He will with His own, and to dispose of His creatures according to His infinite and unerring wisdom. This, to some of you may appear very harsh. Well, I do not wish that harsh words from my lips should unnecessarily wound the feelings of any honest child of God; but that which He has taught me, that which He has revealed to me and in me I must declare unto you, "whether men will hear, or whether they forbear." (Ezek. 2:7)

Universal man is naturally opposed to God. His mind is

"ENMITY AGAINST GOD,

not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. 8:7) This being the case, if there must be a revelation of God's mind and will to any man, it must be independently of anything he possesses as a relative of Adam the first. Now God is pleased to reveal Himself in the purpose of His love through Christ Jesus, by the grace and indwelling of God the Holy Ghost, to the whole election of grace. It has pleased

Him, in union with a risen and exalted Christ, to send His Spirit down to these wilds of sin, ignorance, error, and superstition, to seek out His people to whom He gives a new heart, and by His exceeding great and precious promises makes them partakers of the Divine nature. (2 Pet. 1:4) To them He gives a heavenly mind and a spiritual understanding. You see this in 1 John 5:20: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." In the portion alluded to just now the apostle Peter goes a little into detail in this matter. Turn to 2 Pet. 1:2-4: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature." That is a wonderful expression! "Partakers of the Divine nature." This nature is impeccable, immutable as pure as Himself. In that nature He lives and works, bringing the partakers thereof into the knowledge of His mind and will as revealed in this blessed Book, according to which He communicates the blessings of His counsel and covenant to them.

"And that He might make known." Mark you! All gracious communications and spiritual revelations must be from the God of all grace Himself. I may stand here and preach very clearly, prove every point according to the Scriptures, but I cannot convey a single truth, or apply a single promise to your hearts. We may well sing with Joseph Irons, now in glory,

"We have listen'd to the preacher,

Truth by him has now been shown;

But we want a greater Teacher

From the everlasting throne.

Application

Is the work of God alone."

I cannot communicate a single lesson of grace to your spiritual understandings this must be wholly by God Himself. This you will see in that oft-repeated portion: (Eph. 1:17,18) "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened: that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

Here Paul prays that the God-given understanding might be enlightened by the God-given Spirit. All Divine revelation must be by Divine power and grace, and that to a nature Divinely associated and Divinely communicated. It is utterly impossible for the carnal mind to receive, hold, or understand the mind and will of Jehovah, and the enmity of the same is soon manifest, His will asserts His sovereignty in the election and selection to Himself of those eternally-loved and highly-favoured ones whom He will save in Christ Jesus with an everlasting salvation.

Now turn to 1 Cor. 2:7 and following verses: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath

prepared for them that love Him." What does that mean? The popular notion and view of this is.

That we in our present state cannot comprehend the glories of heaven or enter intelligently into that glory which surrounds the saints when, divested of the burden of the flesh, they enter into that undisturbed felicity which God has prepared for them up yonder. Such an idea is foreign to this portion. Read the whole chapter, and you will find nothing about heaven or future glory. Paul treats of present-tense realities and blessings. When he says, "Eye hath not seen," he means his own natural eye.

When he says, "nor ear heard," he means his own natural ear. When he says, "neither have entered into the heart of man," he means his own natural heart. A blind eye, a deaf ear, a deceitful heart cannot be interested in heavenly themes. But notice, an expression unscriptural is generally interpolated here. "Neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive." I have oftentimes wondered where that word conceive is to be found. Look at this 1 Cor. 2:9, and you find it not. Turn to Isa. 64:4, the portion from which it is quoted, and you find it not there.

There is not an allusion to the natural heart conceiving spiritual truths; but if you will turn to Isa. 59:12,13: you will see what the natural heart can, and does, conceive, not only the natural heart of the unregenerate, but that of the regenerate also. See! "For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them: in transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving" (there you have it!) "conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood."

Who did the prophet allude to here? To himself and to all the godly remnant in experimental oneness with him as they saw themselves in the light of those glorious perfections shining in the person of Jesus Christ. These knew the truth of Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" If this be so, then how can we be instructed in the things of the kingdom? Here is the secret: "But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit." It is not, He will reveal them unto us by-and-bye, but He hath revealed them to our enlightened understanding by His Spirit. This brings us to notice

II. GOD'S RICHES "The riches of His glory." I like that expression. We find it again and again throughout the New Testament Scriptures. Isaiah prophesied, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." Is the Father revealed? He is "the Father of glory." (Eph. 1:17) Is the Son manifested? His is "the Lord of glory." (1 Cor. 2:8) Is the Spirit enjoyed? He is "the Spirit of glory." (1 Pet. 4:14) Every thought, intention, purpose, and desire of Jehovah toward His people in Christ Jesus is glory.

This glory He communicates to them as He brings them into association and identification with Himself hence we are told, "I will make the place of My feet glorious." (Isa. 60:13) Where is the place of JEHOVAH-JESUS feet? It is His Church where His members love to walk up and down in His name. Not so much those who enjoy the covenant love of their God in the heights, but those who mourn their lack of it in the depths. The feet come nearest the ground. Think of this, ye who are uncomely in your own eyes who frequently write bitter things against yourselves, who are ready to cut yourselves off from all hope because of your felt lack of grace, who are down in the dust of self-abasement, who are loathing yourselves upon the dunghill of corruption, who are sighing and crying, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." (Rom. 7:18) These are the very persons who have been formed for God's glory, and who shall show forth His praise.

Now, as assuredly as they have been formed for His glory, they shall be filled with His glory. See! He has declared that the whole earth shall be filled with His glory. Turn to Isa. 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory;" or, as you read in the margin, "His glory is the fullness of the whole earth." His glory! What is His glory? Turn to Isaiah 46:12,13: "Hearken unto Me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness; I bring near My righteousness."

That will do, Lord, Thou canst not bring it too near. Put it upon me and fulfill it in me by the power of Thy blessed Spirit that I may glorify Thee. "It shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for ISRAEL MY GLORY." There you see that the people of God are His glory. God's reason for creating this earth was, that upon it He might display the riches of His grace and glory in the creation, salvation, and glorification of those very persons who are described in my text as vessels of mercy.

He predestinated them "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 them accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:5,6) There we see Jehovah's grace so glorious that man's efforts can never mar or soil it. Then there is the glory of His salvation a salvation designed by the Father of glory, executed by the Lord of glory, and communicated by the Spirit of glory. As the aged Simeon saw God's salvation in the infant Jesus, he described Him as "The Glory of Thy people Israel." (Luke 2:32) But this glory is spoken of in that precious portion place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence." (Isa. 4:5) Blessed be God, He will take care of His own people, He will guard His own truth, He will hold His kingdom for them for whom it is prepared, and His glory shall be seen in and above all.

"The riches of His glory." This denotes the abundance, fertility, power, value, and wealth of His glory. All this we have in Christ, hence the apostle, in Eph. 3:8, says, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given "here we see his humility, for he was compelled to coin a word to express himself "that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." "Eye hath not seen, or ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," the unsearchable riches and the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The riches and glory of the Redeemer's kingdom are blessedly set forth in Isa. 60 and 61., while in 62:3, the glory and worth of the Church are displayed: "Thou shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." Look at Jehovah's testimony concerning His own people in Mal. 3:16,17:"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, 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, in that day when I make up My jewels," or, "special treasure." The riches of Jehovah's glory He has lavished upon His Church and people, and His whole glory and delight is in them as He sees them raised, enriched, ennobled, and crowned in undisturbed oneness with the Son of His love. You see something of this, as you are led by His blessed Spirit, in Eph. 1:18: "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Mark you, it does not say, the riches of the glory of the saints' inheritance in him, but the very reverse, though both are gloriously true. Oh, how near and dear are the saints to the heart of their covenant God! Dear and precious as His own word, ay, as His own existence. We see this must be so when we understand the terms of God's everlasting covenant aright, the terms existing between the Father and the Son, and witnessed to by God the ever-blessed Spirit. The ancient form of entering into covenant engagements is seen in Gen. 15:10-17 and Jer. 34:18,19. The covenanting parties would pass between the pieces of the divided carcasses of slain beasts, and in passing, say, "If I perform not my part of this

agreement, may I be as this calf, or, may I cease to exist." So the Father may be considered as saying to the Son, "If I perform not My part in this covenant in giving Thee a people, the fruit of Thy sufferings, to reign with Thee in Thine eternal glory, may I cease to exist." So may the Son be considered as saying to the Father, "If I keep and save not those whom Thou hast given unto Me, and present them not to Thee in all the glory which Thou hast given unto Me for them, may I cease to exist." Who can comprehend in all their fullness and blessedness, "the riches of His glory?"

III. GOD'S RESERVE "The vessels of mercy." What a high and inestimable privilege it is to be brought by the teaching of God the ever-blessed Spirit into the faintest apprehension of our interest in truths so glorious and Divine. We sang this morning but how many of us with the spirit and with the understanding also? Those blessed words of Watts:

"Behold the potters and the clay,

They form the vessels as they please:

Such is our God, and such are we,

The subjects of His high decrees."

Look at the base original of these vessels of the earth, earthy. Earthen vessels. (2 Cor. 4:7) "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:21) We see this power displayed in Cain, the child of the devil, and Abel, the child of God; (1 John 3:10-12) in Ishmael, a child of the flesh, and Isaac, a child of promise; (Gal. 4:29-31) in Esau hated, and Jacob loved; (Mal. 1:2,3) in Judas, the son of the devil, and Jesus, the Son of God; (John 6:70) in the Pharisee who was wholly taken up with himself, and the publican who could not live without his God; (Luke 18:10-14) in the two thieves, one left to blaspheme and perish, while the other, by an act of sovereign love, was brought to own the sovereignty of the expiring One by his side in that prayer of his: "Lord," there is acknowledgment of Jesus' sovereignty; "Remember me," there is a cry of helplessness; "When Thou comest into Thy kingdom," there is sovereignty again. God's sovereign right to do as He will with His own is revealed in every page of his blessed Book, and who among us, blessed with the guidance of God the ever-blessed Spirit, with a little love melting the heart, and a little light cheering the head, but what can cry, "Lord, why me? Why me?" Why am I here this morning to declare the sovereignty of His grace, while in roaming over the past I can see first one and then another taken where? According to their works, which were of the flesh, taken away as vessels of wrath, and fitted by the very sins in which they wallowed, and the debauchery in which they delighted, for eternal destruction. Well does the searching language of the apostle suit our adoring hearts: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Or, as you read in the margin: "Who distinguisheth thee?" (1 Cor. 4:7)

"Vessels of mercy." God's utensils, made for His own use and for His own glory, to contain heavenly treasure according to the riches of His grace. Here this treasure is spoken of as mercy. What is mercy? It is God's covenant love manifested to elect sinners who know and feel their misery love visiting and comforting those who mourn and weep over their vileness, abominations, and wretchedness, and who find no peace but in precious atoning blood and justifying righteousness. These are vessels of mercy formed by an all-wise and unerring hand. You will find a very wonderful expression in Proverbs 25:4: "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the Finer." This is a covenant command from Jehovah's lips. A separating work must take place in all those whom He acknowledges as His own

peculiar property and special treasure. The dross shall be taken from the silver however painful the process may be in the experience of those whom He will manifest as vessels of mercy, and they must come forth as such for the heavenly Finer. As assuredly as He has put His mark of election love upon them, so will He bring them through the fire, and refine them as silver is refined, and as He sees them coming forth from the crucible, He will say, "It is My people," and will draw out the response from their grateful hearts, "The Lord is my God." (Zech. 13:9) Poor Job knew something of this when he cried out, "He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10) Now turn to Acts 9:15, and you will see that God's vessels are all of His own choice. "He is a chosen vessel unto Me." Chosen by God before the worlds were framed, and His choice of them is manifested in their regeneration and separation from the world, to Himself and for Himself. They are also made to honour; (2 Tim. 2:20) therefore He will thrust honour upon them. See Isa. 43:4: "Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." This is true of every elect, redeemed, and regenerate child of God.

"Vessels of mercy." Look at a few of them. In themselves naturally no different to the rest of mankind, and what magnifies the riches of Jehovah's grace still more is, as we view them in the unexaggerated records of God's most Holy Word, they appear to our judgment intensely worse than their contemporaries. This may prove a little encouragement to those of you who are writing bitter things against yourselves, and who feel almost too vile to hope in His mercy. My dear friends, look at that wretched character, Manasseh.

He was the son of the righteous and godly Hezekiah, yet, as though hell were let loose to do its worst in and by him, he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, degraded the worship and service of Israel's God by setting up idols in the high places, and lifting up his hand against that God who in love had planned the very means whereby His banished Manasseh should not be eternally expelled from Him. Mercy overtook Manasseh among the thorns, and brought him as a vessel of mercy to be filled with grace here and glory yonder.

We behold with wonder and astonishment the magnanimous mercy of our God in the case of the thief upon the cross. One moment his mouth was filled with blasphemy and reviling against the Saviour and Friend of sinners, the next, when in the very throes of dissolution, the enmity of his heart was slain by a look of sovereign love; distinguishing grace took him captive, and in the misery of his soul he prayed, "Lord remember me." The dying Saviour revealed His rich and precious mercy to his heart, and winged His flight to the realms of eternal bliss with this everlastingly loved vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory.

Notice Saul of Tarsus. There he is, a vessel overflowing with wrath and madness against the Christ of God. The description given of him in Acts 9:1, is fearful. "And Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;" ay, and according to Acts 26:11, he compelled the saints of the Most High to blaspheme, being exceedingly mad against them. In a moment he was stricken to the earth, while the truth of covenant union sounded in his ears from the mouth of Zion's King, "Why persecutest thou Me?"

Blind, helpless, and miserable, he was led into Damascus, to hear from the lips of Ananias the blessed fact, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Look at Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ cast seven devils. One has spoken of her, and I think not too strongly, as a walking hell; yet, purged and cleansed by her Master, she was a vessel meet for his use and prepared unto every good work. You see the sovereignty of grace displayed in the case of the

beastly Corinthians.

They are represented in 1 Cor. 6:9,10, as awfully depraved, ay, positively disgusting; yet, says the Holy Ghost by Paul: "And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." O what sweet encouragement we find in these things for sorrowing, seeking sinners.

"The poorer the wretch, the welcomer here."

IV. GOD'S REGARD for them "Which He had afore prepared unto glory." Prepared in the purposes of Jehovah. See Eph. 1:3-6. Blessed in Christ chosen in Christ holy and without blame before the Father in Christ predestinated in Christ graced in Christ accepted in the Beloved. According to that precious verse we have been singing,

"Then, in the glass of His decrees,

Christ and His bride appear'd as one;

Her sin, by imputation, His,

Whilst she in spotless splendour shone."

Prepared in the purchased of them by the redeeming blood of Christ that blood washing them from all sin, cleansing them from all impurity, and shielding them from the accusations and assaults of Satan. Prepared as they stand in the perfect obedience of their Surety and Saviour, and as He is formed in them the Hope of glory. Prepared in His representing them before the face of the Father, interceding for them, and sending His Spirit to teach them that as He is so are they in this world, righteous in His righteousness, perfect in His perfections, complete in Him. Oh, what a glorious state, "without fault before the throne of God."

"Being justified freely by grace through the blood,

Though still sinning, I'm free from all sin."

Prepared by the power of the blessed Spirit who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us, while we see in them all our salvation, righteousness, acceptance, grace, and glory. So, if I am a vessel of mercy, a partaker of His grace now, and to be filled with His glory hereafter, it is all from my union to Christ by the grace and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. I have nothing good or gracious apart from my glorious Lord. Who are these vessels of mercy?

"Even us, whom He hath called." Are we called? Is there any sweetness in the name of Jesus to our hearts? Do we hate sin because it cost Him so much smart? Do we hate the ways of the world and the pretentious parade of the self-satisfied professor? Are we satisfied that our salvation rests wholly in the will of a sovereign God? If such be our experience, we have the marks of His calling, and by His grace we shall bow before Him in the language of His own dear Son, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." (Matt. 11:26)

"Even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." (Rom. 9:24) The middle wall of partition broken down. God's elect scattered throughout the world are those whom He will bring as vessels of mercy afore prepared to sing His praises in eternal glory.

May He add His blessing for His own name's sake. Amen.

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