

God's Glad Tidings.



**GOSPEL ADDRESSES
BY W. W. FEREDAY.**

LONDON :

A. Holness, 14 Paternoster Row, E.C.

GLASGOW :

Pickering & Inglis, 11 Bothwell Circus.

BAKEWELL :

W. W. Fereday, "Normanhirst."

TO THE READER.

THE little volume of addresses, entitled "The Old, Old Story," has been so much appreciated that it seems desirable to issue another volume similar in character. If these pages are used of God to help anxious souls into peace and blessing, or if they afford suggestions to those who preach the Word, the writer will be truly thankful.

CONTENTS.

THE SWORD OF GOD (Gen. iii. 24, etc.),	7
TWO GREAT QUESTIONS (Gen. iv. 10, etc.),	11
THE ASS AND THE LAMB (Exod. xiii. 13),	15
FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH (1 Sam. xxviii. 19, etc.), ...	19
“IS IT PEACE?” (2 Kings ix. 22),	23
“ME” AND “MY SINS” (Psalm xli. 12, etc.),	28
“GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY” (Prov. xxv. 25),	31
HUMAN INSENSIBILITY (Isa. i. 3, etc.),	35
PEACE: FALSE AND TRUE (Jer. vi. 14, etc.),	39
AN IMPERIAL CONVERT (Dan. iv. 1, 2),	42
JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST (Zech. iii. 2),	46
A DIVINE COMPLAINT (John v. 40-45),	49
MAN’S MOUTH (Rom. iii. 14, etc.),	52
“NO DIFFERENCE” (Rom. iii. 22, etc.),	57
“SO GREAT SALVATION” (Heb. ii. 3),	61
CREATOR: SAVIOUR: FATHER (1 Pet. iv. 19),	65

THE SWORD OF GOD.

"He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim and a flaming sword."—Gen. iii. 24.

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts."—Zech. xiii. 7.

"Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword."—Rev. xix. 15.

THERE is a tender side, and there is also a stern side, to the divine character, for God is both light and love. Rom. xi. 22 bids us "behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." But who is competent to declare either? Who is able to sound the depths of the matchless statement that "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son? (John iii. 16). Or who can adequately gauge the meaning of the solemn warning, "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever?" (Rev. xiv. 11).

Men are always apt to think of God with a bias in their minds. Some perceive the tender side of His character and imagine that because God is love there cannot possibly be an eternal hell; others again fail to see the tender side at all, and think of God like the man in Matt. xxv. 24, who said: "Lord, I know Thee that Thou art a hard man, reaping where Thou hast not sown, and gathering where Thou hast not strawed." Neither the one nor the other really know God in their hearts.

Our theme just now is the sword of God. The first mention of it in Scripture is in Gen. iii. 24. The Lord God placed at the gate of Eden, a Cherubim and a flaming sword. This marked the close of the first chapter in the history of man—a sorrowful close surely. The Creator

made man for His pleasure. He endowed him richly, placing him in the most delightful surroundings, and granting him manifestations of Himself. It was needful that some test should be imposed, in order that it might be seen whether this responsible being would continue in faithfulness or not ; the test took the form of a divine prohibition of one tree. Against this, the man, led by the woman, who was herself deceived by Satan, rebelled, and thus fell from his first estate. He could no longer be suffered to continue in the garden, and was accordingly expelled, though not until words of hope were sounded in his ear in the curse upon the serpent. The Cherubim and the sword were then placed at the east of Eden to keep the way of the tree of life. Man has thus forfeited all claim to life. Life—eternal life—can only now be had as the gift of sovereign grace. What a moment for the heart of God when He found Himself compelled to draw His sword against His favoured creature man, posting also at the garden gate the administrators of His judgment !

But we pass to Zech. xiii. 7 : “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd.” Who is the speaker? Jehovah of hosts, the God of the flaming sword. Of whom is He speaking? Of His beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We have thus the sword of God directed against the sinner in Gen. iii. and against Christ in Zech. xiii. Mark how this passage speaks of the person and sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Jehovah calls Him “My fellow.” He is thus divine. In no sense and at no time was He ever inferior to Him. “I and My Father are one,” said He in the days of His flesh—one in majesty, power, wisdom and glory. But Jehovah of hosts calls Him “the man.” He became this in His grace—the seed of the woman, that He might bruise the serpent’s head. We thus think of the Saviour as uniting Godhead and

manhood in His one sacred person. But He must needs suffer ; for incarnation could not of itself suffice to procure our salvation. So we hear the awful words, " Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith Jehovah of hosts ; smite the shepherd." This was at Calvary. There the good Shepherd did not merely risk His life for the sheep, like David when he pursued the lion and the bear, but He laid down His life. Well knowing all that would befall Him in this world, He came from heaven's glory, and did not pause in His downward course until He closed His eyes in death upon Calvary's tree. What a moment it was when God felt Himself obliged to sheath His sword in the heart of the Son of His love ! But in the hour that He was thus smitten of God He wrought a full and efficacious atonement for our sin and guilt.

In Rev. xix. 15 we have a sword proceeding out of the mouth of Christ. This time the sword is directed against the foes of God and His Son. The language is necessarily symbolical, as occurring in the book of Revelation, but its meaning is plain enough. It is judgment executed at His command. When will this be? When He rises up from the throne upon which He is now seated, and comes forth in His majesty and might. Rev. xix. 11-21 gives us a graphic description beforehand of that terrible day.

It is God's way before drawing His sword to sound the trumpet. Turn, please, to Ezek. xxxiii. 4, 5, and you will see this plainly. " Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning ; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and took not warning," etc. Thus before God destroyed the earth by water, He sounded the warning trumpet by means of Noah : and

in our own time, ere the last stroke falls, His trumpet resounds in the Gospel call. Will you not heed it, and seek salvation while you may? "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?" (Amos iii. 6). Will you not be afraid, and flee from the wrath to come? Does the Gospel trumpet sound in your ears in vain? I conclude by quoting Prov. xxix. 1: "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." God grant this may not be your doom!

TWO GREAT QUESTIONS.

“What hast thou done?”—Gen. iv. 10.

“What think ye of Christ?”—Matt. xxii. 42.

IT has frequently been remarked that there are two great questions concerning which God is dealing with the children of men—the sin question and the Son question. Both are before us in these passages of Scripture. With neither the one nor the other do men care to burden themselves. Gladly would they shelve them altogether. It is the business of the preacher to arouse men's consciences both as to sin and as to God's beloved Son.

We have the question of sin raised in Gen. iv. 10: “What hast thou done?” True, the words were addressed to Cain by the Lord God after the murder of his brother Abel. But the challenge comes home to us all. Let us review our lives in the light of God. We have spent so many years in this world—20, 30, 40 or more, as the case may be. They have been years of responsibility to Him who created us. But what have we done? If it be asked what we should have done, and how our lives should have been regulated, our Lord's words in Luke x. 27 supply the answer. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”

There is no mistaking such language as this. Every nook and cranny of our moral being should be filled with devotion to God, and from this should flow unselfish love to all others. But “what hast thou done?” Who amongst us would dare to affirm that he has so lived? What then? Rom. iii. 22 puts us all in our place: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” As the Prayer Book

expresses it : " We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us."

Some will doubtless affirm that they are not so bad as others. So said the Pharisee of Luke xviii. But the question still remains, Have you sinned at all? I have lying before me a curious calculation cut from the pages of a magazine. One sin in thought, one in word, and one in deed, committed daily, amounts to 10,950 sins in ten years, 21,900 sins in twenty years, and so on. Thus the youth of 20 has 21,900 sins standing to his debit in the book of God, reckoning upon the low basis of one sin in thought, one in word, and one in deed daily. 21,900 sins ! This is a pretty serious matter is it not? Young man, is it not time for you to seek divine pardon?

Someone will perhaps say : " I wish you would change your tune, sir. Why do you so persistently bring forward this question of sin?" Herod doubtless said something of the same sort to John the Baptist. The King frequently sent for the great preacher, but his one text was : " It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." The imperfect tense in the Greek of Mark vi. 18 shows this to have been John's habitual theme with the wicked monarch. One of Charles II.'s chaplains, who was wont to sternly denounce sin, is said to have been warned by the King to alter his manner of preaching. The faithful chaplain replied : " I will, your Majesty, when you alter your manner of living." The guilt of sin is the first divine lesson every man has to learn. Until this has been learnt no other lesson is possible.

We come now to the second great question : " What think ye of Christ?" Observe, please, the context of

the passage. Our blessed Lord had been beset with cavilling questions from Sadducees, Pharisees, and lawyers. He had silenced them every one; not only giving direct answers to their inquiries, but making home thrusts at their consciences also. When they had said their last word, His opportunity came, and He turned upon them thus: "What think ye of Christ?"

This is a question altogether out of the ordinary, for every man's eternal future depends upon the answer which his heart gives thereto. The question of the Son is interwoven in a remarkable manner with the question of sin. We shall see this presently. Some think of Him as a wonderful teacher. They say that if men would only live according to the principles inculcated in the Sermon on the Mount we should soon have an ideal condition of society. Others think of Him as an example. They speak of His life in the highest terms, and express their conviction that all who follow His example can never go far wrong. All this sounds very excellent. Surely men who speak thus must think highly of Christ!

But if the Son of God is no more than a teacher or exemplar, of what benefit is He to me a sinner? I ask the question with all reverence. His life and teaching rebuke, but do not help me in the smallest degree. "What think ye of Christ?" Let us hear John the Baptist's account of Him. As to His person, he says: "He it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" (John i. 27). Truly human, yet truly divine; greater than the greatest of the prophets. As to His character, we hear John saying to Him in Matt. iii. 14: "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" All others who came to John at Jordan had sins to confess, but not this One. As to His work, let us listen to John once more: "Behold

the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world " (John i. 29). This means a propitiatory sacrifice. Now listen to Paul as he expresses himself concerning God's Christ. As to His person, he says: " He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for by Him were all things created; . . . and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist " (Col. i. 15-17). To Paul He was thus the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. As to His work, hear the apostle in 1 Tim. i. 15: " This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

In the eyes of both John and Paul the Christ was thus the divine Son of God, who stooped from Godhead glory to the death of the cross in order to make atonement for human sin and guilt. Only those who regard Him thus in faith have true thoughts concerning Him.

What think ye of Christ? All manner of sin may be forgiven. The blood of the Lamb is sufficient to cleanse the reddest stains. But the rejection of Him is unpardonable. " He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-begotten Son of God " (John iii. 18).

THE ASS AND THE LAMB.

“Every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck, and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.”—Exod. xiii. 13.

THE instructions here are of a remarkable character, and they are repeated in Exo. xxxiv. 20. To call a man “an ass” would be the reverse of complimentary, and yet in these passages Jehovah indicates an analogy between the firstborn of an ass and the firstborn of man, for both had to be redeemed in the selfsame way. So serious a suggestion demands our earnest consideration.

First, let us see how the ass of Scripture is described. We shall then be able to say how far this animal is the representative of ourselves. To begin with, it fell into the category of unclean beasts. To be accounted clean, an animal must divide the hoof and chew the cud (Lev. xi. 26). The ass does not belong to this class. Is man a clean creature, or an unclean in the eyes of God? Long ago Bildad asked: “How can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” Listen also to Job’s pitiful wail: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one” (Job. xxv. 4; xiv. 4). Then hear David’s broken-hearted confession: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa. li. 5). These men evidently had a deep sense of their own moral uncleanness. Now notice how Isaiah, speaking representatively, describes the condition of his nation: “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Not only did the prophet thus declare the evil of others; in an earlier chapter he says of himself: “Woe is me! for I

am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. lxiv. 6; vi. 5). It was the sight of the glory of Jehovah that so filled him with dismay at his own condition. The most frequent type of sin in Scripture is the loathsome disease of leprosy. Let us not deceive ourselves. In the eye of God, man with all his vaunted light and learning is as unclean as the ass that he despises.

In the Word of God the ass is not only represented as unclean; it is also the very synonym for self-will. Read Jehovah's account of him in his expostulation with His servant in Job xxxix. 5-8. And what is sin? It is correctly defined in the Revised Version of 1 John iii. 4: "Sin is lawlessness." In other words, sin is doing our own will to the neglect of the will of God. Who can plead exemption here? Who amongst us does not love to have his own way at whatever cost? The life of the natural man is described in Eph. ii. 3 as "fulfilling the will of the flesh and of the mind." In Psa. xii. 4 haughty, insubject men are represented as saying: "Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?" Job xi. 12 is very pointed when it says: "Vain man would be wise, though man be born a wild ass's colt." Gen. xvi. 12, correctly rendered, says of Ishmael, "He will be a wild ass of a man."

The analogy is thus complete between the unclean and self-willed ass and our poor fallen race. In one point man has sunk even lower than the ass, as Isa. i. 3 shows. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." In other words, these beasts at least know to whom they belong; man, on the contrary, in the stupidity of his unbelief, fails to perceive that his owner and master is God.

What a wonderful work is conversion ! It is a turning right round. Horrified at their previous perverseness and self-will, converted ones humbly acknowledge, " All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all " (Isa. liii. 6).

The law of Sinai was given as a curb upon the flesh. It fenced man about with prohibitions. " Thou shalt not " do this ; " thou shalt not " do that. But it was all of no avail. The law only develops the evil of the human heart by provoking it. Its prohibitions wake up all the latent devilry in man. So the apostle argues in Rom. vii. 7-8. This being true, he calls the law " the strength of sin " in 1 Cor. xv. 56. How hopelessly and incorrigibly evil is flesh if the holy law of God has such an effect upon it ! Yet some plead that there is good in every man if only it be looked for !

For both the firstborn of the ass and also of man a lamb must be sacrificed in Israel. The lamb typified Christ. " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world " (John i. 29). In its characteristics the lamb is the very opposite of the ass. Clean, it typifies Him who, though born of a sinful mother like ourselves, yet entered the world unstained in nature. All His ways too, were holy. His very judge had to say of Him : " I find no fault in this man." The lamb is also the symbol of meekness. How suitably do we read in Isa. liii. 7 of the Lord Jesus : " He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." This is the passage that the Ethiopian was quietly pondering in his chariot when Philip accosted him. With charming simplicity he inquired of the Evangelist : " I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this ? Of himself, or of some other man ? "

(Acts viii. 34). With all readiness "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

The meek and clean One must needs die for the self-willed and the unclean—even ourselves. God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21). Now He asks nothing from the conscience-stricken sinner but the humble acknowledgment of the mighty fact that Jesus died and rose again. But what of those who refuse to take the place of perishing ones before God? Destruction, as in the case of the unredeemed ass in Israel. Concerning a scornful rejecter of long ago, it was said: "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer. xxii. 19). In other words, he was cast out of God's dwelling-place as unclean. Of the new Jerusalem it is written: "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth" (Rev. xxi. 27). Happier far to take the place of the ass here and accept redemption by the blood of the Lamb than be thrust into the ass's outside place for evermore.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

“To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me. . . . Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel.”—1 Sam. xxviii. 19, 20.

“We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”—Paul, in 2 Cor. v. 8.

THESE passages show us two men face to face with death, and the feelings which possessed them at the great crisis. Remarkably each bore the same name, and each had a violent death before him. Death is always a solemn thing. It marks the close of one stage of a man's being, and it is the gateway into the indefinite beyond. It is thus a test for every man. Mistakes made on earth cannot be rectified in eternity. Even the believer in Jesus realizes the solemnity of the great change. Whatever opportunities of usefulness have been missed here will never recur again; and they must be accounted for to the Lord whom we serve. But the ungodly man has every reason to quake when death lays its icy hand upon him; for in his case “the last enemy” is the policeman come to bring him up to judgment. It is what comes after death that guilty ones dread (Heb. ix. 27).

Let us briefly consider the circumstances of King Saul. His forty years' reign of self-will and disobedience to God was now ending. The Philistines had declared war against him, and he was to meet them in battle on the morrow. Filled with foreboding, the unhappy King appealed to God, but without avail. Then he inquired for someone possessed of a familiar spirit; and learning that there was such a person at Endor, he went by night in a disguise and asked her to bring up Samuel. Some will perhaps say: “That is somewhat like what Spiritualists do to-day.” They do absolutely nothing

of the kind. The claim to put the living in communication with the dead is a monstrous fraud. The keys of Hades are in divine hands alone. Neither the just nor the unjust can be disturbed by Spiritualistic mediums. Yet it is not denied that such persons are in communication with the invisible world, but it is with demons they have to do, and it is with demons the mediums link up their miserable dupes.

No one was more astonished than the woman of Endor herself when Samuel really appeared. Never having known such a result from her previous incantations, she at once discerned the hand of God, and concluded that her visitor must be King Saul. Samuel forthwith challenged his disturber: "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" A dead man speaking! Certainly Samuel was not in the resurrection state (for that he must wait until the Lord's coming); he simply appeared in some form by divine permission. It has been asserted that the dead are in a condition of unconsciousness. Ecc. ix. 5 is quoted in proof—"the dead know not anything." But the writer of that book is concerned with things "under the sun"; and in the passage referred to he means that the dead are no longer able to follow the course of things down here. The story of the rich man and Lazarus (to which may be added such passages as Isa. xiv. 9; Ezek. xxxii. 21) is sufficient to show that both saved and lost are fully alive to the reality of their condition in the unseen world. Besides, the apostle says as to himself that to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord.

"To-morrow shalt thou be with me." Samuel did not mean by this that Saul would be found in the same place and circumstances as himself. Between saved and lost

"there is a great gulf fixed," which is impassable from either side. Samuel simply meant that Saul would be in the death-state next day; that is to say, numbered amongst the dead like the departed prophet.

There is no trace of tenderness in Samuel's words. Time was when he had cried to Jehovah all night on behalf of Saul (1 Sam. xv. 11). But Saul had sinned away his day of grace, and nothing remained but to pronounce sentence upon him. "Jehovah is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy." So said the prophet. "God is departed from me," wailed Saul, "and answereth me no more." Solemn position in which to be found! Saul had had many opportunities. His early reign was blessed with the light of God's presence, and with the counsel and support of the prophet. Yet his privileges were as nothing compared with those of men to-day who are permitted to hear the Gospel of Christ proclaimed in their ears. How awful should God say of anyone amongst us: "Let him alone" (Hos. iv. 17).

Let us ask ourselves what our feelings would be if some such message as was delivered to Saul was delivered to us. What if from the realms of the dead we heard the words: "To-morrow shalt thou be with me?" The believer in Jesus would say with rapture: "To depart and to be with Christ is far better" (Phil. i. 23). But the football enthusiast and the lover of the theatre—what would they say? Dr. Johnson, of Uttoxeter fame, once remarked after visiting a place of amusement: "It went to my heart to consider that there was not one in all that brilliant circle that was not afraid to go home and think, but that the thoughts of each individual there would be distressing when alone."

When Saul heard of his impending death he "fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid."

We are reminded of Jacob when he learned that he must now meet the one against whom he had sinned: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen. xxxii. 7).

Now mark the contrast to all this in Paul the apostle. His life was in jeopardy for the Gospel's sake. But was he dismayed? The very reverse. "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 8). It is such an unusual thing to find men willing to be absent from the body (even the devil once said, "All that a man hath will he give for his life"), that we are constrained to inquire as to the ground of the apostle's confidence. His own words in Rom. v. 8 tell us all we need know as to this: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners; Christ died for us." Here we have that which, when known and believed, banishes from the soul all dread of death. Christ has been into death for us, thus making complete atonement for all our sin and guilt, and breaking the power of the enemy once and for ever.

IS IT PEACE ? ”

“ It came to pass, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, ‘ Is it peace, Jehu ? ’ And he answered, ‘ What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many ? ’ ”

—2 Kings ix. 22.

THERE is anxiety, and even alarm, discernible in the inquiry of Joram, “ Is it peace, Jehu ? ” The sequel proved that there was ample occasion for these sentiments. It was a time of upheaval in Israel. A revolution was in progress, which presently cost King Joram both his throne and his life.

The circumstances may be briefly stated. Israel and Syria were at war over Ramoth-Gilead. Joram, being wounded, had been obliged to return to Jezreel in order to consult his physicians, leaving his officers to prosecute the campaign. One day there arrived in the camp one of the sons of the prophets, who informed Jehu that it was Jehovah’s will that he should be King over Israel. Nothing loth, Jehu sought the co-operation of his fellow-captains, and forthwith set out for Jezreel to overturn the throne of his master. The watchman on the tower of the royal city reporting the rapid approach of a company, two horse-men were sent forth to inquire if all was well. The messengers not returning, the King set out himself to meet Jehu, with the anxious question in our text. “ Is it peace ? ” Note the reply. “ What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many ? ” The meaning is that no peace could be expected with so much unjudged sin in the land.

Joram, who thus rode out to his death, had been a very privileged person. Jehovah had taken great pains with him. See this King in chap. iii. of this book, turning,

with two other sovereigns, to the prophet in circumstances of dire distress. No water was available for their hosts. Their need was graciously met in the goodness of God. Then we have him in chap. v. made aware of Jehovah's wonderful healing power in the matter of Naaman's leprosy. In the following chapter we find God warning him on several occasions of designs against his life, and thus safeguarding him. Chap. vii. gives the story of the siege of Samaria, and the marvellous intervention of God on behalf of the famine-stricken people; and chap. viii. shews us the King in conversation with Gehazi, and learning from him all the wonderful works of Elisha his master. In these various ways Jehovah spoke to this man's heart and conscience, if haply he would turn from his evil ways and live. But with all these divine privileges, Joram perished. How often has God spoken to us! Let us ask ourselves, how many privileges He has mercifully vouchsafed unto us?

There is a present-day application of our text. We are living in a time of universal disturbance. Revolutions in both East and West; wars and threats of wars in various directions. In the industrial sphere there is unrest everywhere. Thinking men are pretty much in the state of mind described by the Saviour in Luke xxi. 25-26: "Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." The anxious inquiry on every hand is: "Is it peace?" How relieved men are to learn that the atmosphere in the direction of Germany is somewhat clearer than formerly! With what thankfulness do men hear of a strike averted here or settled there! How would all England feel if to-morrow's newspaper reported a settlement of the coal dispute? Yet everyone realizes that these questions are

not really being laid to rest, that the difficulties are only being bridged over, to surge up again at some future date. No one believes the root is being reached.

"Is it peace?" is the anxious question to-day, as in the time of Joram. The answer to men now must be upon the same lines as the answer to him so long ago. Peace is impossible with sin unjudged. There is a sin lying at the door of the world to-day compared with which even Jezebel's whoredoms and witchcrafts were the veriest trifles. What sin is that?

Go back with me in your thoughts 1,900 years in the world's history. In the village of Bethlehem a Babe was born of whom it was written centuries before: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace" (Isa. ix. 6). Outside in the fields the angelic host celebrated His birth thus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke ii. 14). He came from heaven to bring peace into a scene long distracted by sin. Judgment was not His mission. As Peter put it in Acts x. 36, God was "preaching peace by Jesus Christ." Aged Simeon, as he beheld the wondrous Babe, blessed God, saying: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." The sight of the Saviour dispelled from his mind all fear of death, and filled his soul with peace.

But men rejected the Prince of peace. "Depart from us" was men's cry to God before the flood (Job xxii. 17); the cry was the same when the Son came to earth. Since the Son was the revealer of the Father, the rejection

of the Son involved the rejection of the Father also. "They have both seen and hated both Me and My Father" (John xv. 24). This explains the Saviour's words in Matt. x. 34: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." His mission was peace, but men's refusal of Him has made peace impossible, and they have to suffer the sword instead. When the Lord Jesus thought of the consequences to men, He wept, saying: "if thou hadst known . . . the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke xix. 42). And so it has become true of men everywhere: "the way of peace have they not known" (Rom. iii. 17).

There are not wanting those who prophesy smooth things. In Jeremiah's day some said "Peace, Peace" while Jehovah's sword hung suspended over the land, and we have similiar false prophets amongst us at the present time. If such may be believed, the upheavals that are going on in every sphere are the birth throes of a new and better day. Man is emerging from the chrysalis stage, and will presently be a more glorious being than ever before. All who speak thus are deceivers of men's souls. More to the point are Isaiah's words in chap. lvii. 20-21 of his book: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked."

What is the Scripture outlook? Smash upon smash, catastrophe upon catastrophe, until the whole of man's order of things has been ground to powder. Then God will bring upon the scene His Man, the world-rejected Jesus, and He will establish His throne upon the ruins of everything human.

Suffer me now to appeal to every individual heart, Why should not you be right with God? Then you need

fear no ill, whatever may befall. Christ has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. i. 20). Here we have the settlement of the sin question, a matter of greater moment to you personally than any political or industrial question in the world. God's claims as to sin have been met by the atoning blood. Accordingly peace is preached "to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh" (Eph. ii. 17); that is to both Gentiles and Jews alike. The believer in Jesus is justified by faith, and has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. v. 1). More than this, every believer is invited to bring his every request to God, with the sweet assurance that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 7). In 2 Thess. iii. 16, at the close of an epistle which deals with the horrors of the last days, we find the comforting words: "The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means." Amid the crash of empires and kingdoms, the overturning of every ancient institution, and the subversion of all law and order, the man who is right with God in virtue of the cross of Calvary can afford to be in perfect peace. It will suffice to close with the words in Job xxii. 21: "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee."

“ME” AND “MY SINS.”

“As for me, Thou beholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before Thy face for ever.”—Psa. xli. 12.

“Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.”—Isa. xxxviii. 17.

IT is a wonderful thing that the Psalmist should say, evidently with pleasure, “Thou settest me before Thy face for ever.” No man naturally wishes to be brought face to face with God. The whole history of the human race proves this conclusively. Adam and his wife, as soon as they were conscious of having sinned, “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.” Cain, after his fearful crime, “went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod.” Jonah in his self-will fled to Tarshish “from the presence of the Lord.” Scripture abounds with instances of men being brought into the divine presence, and being forthwith filled with the deepest distress. Isaiah’s case (chap. vi.) will suffice for an example.

This is a truly awful condition of things when we consider the end and object for which man was created. This is well expressed in the opening words of the Westminster Catechism. Question: “What is the chief end of man?” Answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.”

Men shrink from God’s all-searching eye. As Heb. iv. 13 puts it: “There is no creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” There is much that we can hide from one another, and even from ourselves; there is nothing that we can hide from God.

Yet the Psalmist says with rapture: “Thou settest me before Thy face for ever.” To understand this, we

must go back somewhat in the book of Psalms. In the thirty-second the same writer says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The Holy Spirit's comment upon this passage is found in Rom. iv. 6: "David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." This is the first step towards being happy and free in the presence of God. But upon what equitable basis is He able to impute righteousness to a man apart from works? Psa. xl. will answer. There we hear the Incarnate Son saying: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire. Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." The atoning sacrifice of Calvary, which has superseded for ever all the offerings of the Levitical order, enables God to righteously pardon and justify every sinner who believes in Jesus. The Psalmist was evidently in the sweetness of justification when he penned our text. "Thou upholdest me in mine integrity." Imagine mortal man thus addressing his Maker! It is the Old Testament way of expressing the truth of Rom. viii. 33: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?"

There is thus something to be got rid of ere any man can enjoy God, and be at home in His blessed presence. That something is guilt. How beautifully our two Scriptures run together. "Thou hast cast all *my sins* behind Thy back." "As for me, Thou . . . settest *me* before Thy face for ever."

Psa. xli. has a first and primary reference to the Lord Jesus Himself. HE is before the face of God—justified, accepted, in eternal favour and love. Divine grace has associated me with Him, so that what God has made true of that blessed Man is true of me also. I am "in Him,"

accepted in His acceptance, blessed as He is blessed, and loved as He is loved. No wonder we read in Psa. lxxxiv. 9: "Look upon the face of Thine anointed," i.e., Thy Christ. According to the worthiness that God sees in Him, so is every believer favoured for evermore.

Let us take notice of the words "before Thy face." Not "before Thy throne." The "throne" is suggestive of distance, the "face" of knowledge and intimacy. Character is declared in the face. Throughout eternity, God will be telling out His perfections to His redeemed, and we shall ever be learning what a God He is with whom we have to do. Psa. xxi. 6 says: "Thou hast made him exceeding glad with Thy countenance." Psa. xxvii. 4 describes the heart's deep longing in this connection: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."

"Thou settest me before Thy face for ever." The first man commenced with the knowledge of God, and before sin entered he enjoyed Him according to his measure and circumstances. All this he lost by his transgression. But grace sets the believer in Jesus upon a new footing altogether. Everything now depends upon the triumphant Second Man, and upon what He has accomplished. Thus everything is secured beyond the possibility of forfeiture or loss. "For ever" is my place and portion in the favour and love of God.

GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”—Prov. xxv. 25.

WATER is a symbol of the Gospel. We find it so used in the last chapter of Scripture: “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

In the parable of the Pounds in Luke xix. the Lord likens heaven to “a far country.” Why is this? In the opening chapters of Genesis heaven seems very near, and God a neighbour at hand. We read there of a garden planted by the hand of the Creator, containing everything that was pleasant to the sight and good for food. This was the home of the first man and his wife, and there the Lord God used to come, and hold sweet converse with them. But all this was quickly changed. There came the day when Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. Sin was the cause of this. It was said to Israel at a later date: “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God” (Isa. lix. 2). Sin having thus entered, the divine pleasure in man ceased, and heaven from that moment has seemed “a far country.” There is no moral affinity now between heaven and earth.

But there has been a visitor from the far country. John i. 14 tells us: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us . . . full of grace and truth.” This is the glorious Person of whom we read higher up in the same chapter that He was in the beginning with God, and was God. Moreover, “all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.” What a Visitor! In John vi. 38 we hear Him saying: “I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but

the will of Him that sent Me." His unbelieving hearers stumbled at this, and said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that He saith, I came down from heaven?" In their blindness they saw in Him nothing more than a carpenter's son.

The people of Great Britain are accustomed to distinguished visitors. From time to time Emperors and Kings come to their shores. They are always well received, and they invariably return home well pleased. But how was the Son of God received when He came to earth? "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." Long before, Isaiah had written concerning Him: "He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

The Son of God was not only rejected when He came; He was murdered. In the parable of the Vineyard, He showed this vividly before the dreadful deed was committed. Having sent many servants to the husbandmen without avail, last of all the master of the vineyard sent his son, saying, "They will reverence my son." The master is God; the son is the Lord Jesus. But when the husbandmen saw the son they said: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance" (Matt. xxi.). This is how men treated the Lord Jesus. Spite of His unique words and works, they hated and slew Him (John xv. 22-24).

What next? The young Prince of Wales has recently been touring on the Continent. He has been treated with respect everywhere, but supposing he was murdered, and that by the sanction of the authorities, what would happen next? Surely the heavy hand of retribution would fall

somewhere! When the statue of the Emperor Hadrian was destroyed in a riot at Antioch, the people trembled at the thought of the consequences. But what happened when Christ was slain? In Acts i. we see Him ascending up where He was before, carrying the wounds which men had inflicted upon His sacred Person right up to the throne of God—sight of all sights for the angelic host! What response did God give to this? For ten days there was a lull. Then heaven opened once more, and the Holy Ghost came forth. What for? To destroy the guilty sons of men? No, but to preach the Gospel. Accordingly in Acts ii. we hear Peter charging home upon his hearers their dreadful sin in the murder of Christ, and concluding by offering them all forgiveness in His name. The Saviour, before He went on high, said that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke xxiv. 47). His very murderers were thus to have the first opportunity of blessing. Surely the message of forgiveness of sins for everybody is "good news from a far country." We deserved wrath, and lo, we are offered pardon and peace!

Why are not men keen for such blessings? Our text tells us. They are not "thirsty." Cold waters are only acceptable to thirsty souls. Thirsty ones are most tenderly invited. Rev. xxii. 17 says: "Let him that is athirst come." In John vii. 37 we hear the Saviour's call: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." But men are not thirsty. There is with them no sense of need, and so they are not interested. Yet when "good news" of another kind comes along men are interested enough. Suppose someone in our town fell heir to a fortune or a peerage, would it not quickly become the general topic of conversation? Or, to come

closer home, suppose some man amongst us became notified of an inheritance left to himself, how keen he would be ! Down would go his tools for ever, and he would start forth to take possession of his own. Yet when " good news from a far country " are addressed to men concerning the forgiveness of sins and eternal blessing they are not interested at all ! They see nothing in it worthy of a thought !

One word more. The Visitor from the far country is coming again. The world has not seen the last of Him. The parable of the Pounds says so plainly. But how will He return ? Not in lowly grace, upon a second mission of mercy, but in kingly power, to take vengeance upon all His foes. Hear the terrible words from His own blessed lips : " Those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me " (Luke xix. 27). This is not mere parabolic language, but the setting forth of a dread reality. He who is at present proclaimed as Saviour to all is the divinely appointed Judge of quick and dead. The quick (i.e., the living) He will deal with at His appearing ; the dead He will call before Him when time is ended.

HUMAN INSENSIBILITY.

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib ; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider.”—Isa. i. 3.

“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times ; and the turtle-dove and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming ; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord.”
—Jer. viii. 7.

OF all the creatures with which we are acquainted, man is by far the most gifted and the most privileged. Moreover, he has been established by God lord and head over the whole system in which he moves. This being so, it is painful that a comparison should be divinely instituted between man and beasts and birds, with the result altogether unfavourable to man. In both Isa. i. and Jer. viii. we have throughout the language of complaint. The Creator complains of His creature man. Our texts expose his insensibility—insensibility to both grace and judgment.

Isa. i. 3 was addressed to a people of pastoral habits. It was not yet the day of great manufacturing cities. Every man possessed oxen and asses. Accordingly, Jehovah bids His people go to their own stockyards and learn a lesson there. “The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master’s crib ; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider.” These are not the most intelligent of the domestic animals, but even so they offer a rebuke to man.

The ox knows to whom it belongs, “but Israel doth not know.” Are men more intelligent to-day? Every man belongs to God, but are men alive to the fact? “In Him we live, and move, and have our being . . . we are

His offspring" (Acts xvii. 28). Daniel denounced the wretched Belshazzar thus: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified" (Dan. v. 23). Are men more mindful of their position in relation to God now?

The administration of the universe has been committed to a Man. "The head of every man is Christ" (1 Cor xi. 3). The Father has given Him authority over all flesh (John xvii. 2). Sooner or later every created being will be constrained to acknowledge this. At the name of Jesus every knee must bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii. 10-11). Oh, the blindness that hinders men from perceiving to whom they belong until compelled to do so when time is no more, and salvation has become impossible!

The ass knows who feeds it, "but My people doth not consider." The beast knows from whose hand its bounties come, but not man! Yet, as Paul told the men of Lystra in Acts xiv. 17, God has never left Himself without witness, in that He has done men good, giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling men's hearts with food and gladness. But do men acknowledge His hand? It would be interesting to know in how many homes in this so-called Christian England men have given thanks at the meal table to-day. The old-fashioned "grace" is dying out, in keeping with the growing infidelity of our time. If men fail to own God in His lesser gifts, what is their bearing towards the stupendous gift of His Son? Is Christ appreciated?

Thus in Isa. i. 3 God complains of man's insensibility to grace; in Jeremiah viii. 7 He complains of his insensibility to judgment. The stork, the swallow, etc., know their times, "but My people know not the judgment of

the Lord." The birds named in this passage are all migratory. They take notice of the seasons. They perceive when the period of sunshine is over, and when the clouds and storms of winter are approaching, and they have the instinct to know when they should move off. But alas, for man! What was the character of the times in which Jeremiah prophesied? It was the last days of the Kingdom of Judah. The northern ten-tribe kingdom had already been overthrown, and "the destroyer of the nations" (Nebuchadnezzar) was now on his way to overthrow Judah also. Judgment was thus imminent, but the people understood it not. And so there was no repentance.

In our Lord's day men could discern the face of the sky, but were unable to discern the signs of the times (Matt. xvi. 3). They were too obtuse to see that it was their great day of opportunity. They had the long-expected Messiah in their midst, and if they failed to recognize Him they must lose Him, and have the Roman scourge instead.

The men of Jeremiah's time and our Lord's day find their contrast in Noah. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. xi. 7). Like the crane and the swallow, he saw the dark clouds approaching, and judged it wisdom to seek a place of safety. The men of Nineveh read us an even more striking lesson. The whole city was profoundly stirred at the preaching of Jonah, so that the King came down from his throne, and humbled himself before God in common with all his people. They recognized a warning from heaven in the denunciations of the strange man who walked through their streets. There has never been a

more solemn moment in the history of the world than the present. The portents around us are of the gravest character. Everything is suggestive of coming disaster. A point is being reached in human affairs. Statesmen and leaders of every sort perceive this. But what is the point that is thus almost in sight? The end of man's day, and the ushering in of the day of the Lord. "Man's day" is that long period during which man has been allowed to have his own way without manifest intervention from heaven; the day of the Lord is the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus, which will be introduced abruptly, and with desolating judgments. His appearing will dash to pieces the whole fabric of man's godless civilisation, and upon the ruins thereof He will establish an order of things that will perfectly suit the eye and the heart of God. The wise man says: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself: but the simple pass on and are punished" (Prov. xxii. 3). In view of the break-up that is coming, are you "prudent" or "simple"? Must the swallow and her fellows be your reprovers in the great day?

PEACE: FALSE AND TRUE.

'They have healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace.'—Jer. vi. 14.

'And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.'—Eph. ii. 17.

TWO preachers of peace are seeking to gain the attention of the children of men. Both are in earnest, and in each case the preaching is intended to produce eternal results. These preachers are Satan and Christ. Neither is, of course, in person upon the earth speaking with audible voice. Both make their appeal to men by means of human instruments. There are thus two orders of preachers amongst us, both energised by supernatural power, and both preaching peace to men. Hell energises the one; heaven energises the other. The one order proclaims a false peace—a peace resting upon rotten foundations, and from which there must sooner or later come an awful awakening; the other proclaims a true peace—a peace founded upon the immutable basis of the Saviour's atoning blood.

Let me remind you of a remarkable parable which once came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find it in Luke xi. 21-22. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." The strong man here is Satan; the stronger than he is Christ Himself. The strong man's palace is this world; and his goods are the men and women who live therein. It is Satan's policy to keep these in peace, to lull them to sleep, so that serious thoughts may never disturb their minds. As 1 John v. 19 puts it: "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." He has his arguments for all classes and for all ages, and all designed to keep souls in a state of unconcern and

death. Suppose a young person to become awakened to the great realities of God and eternity. Satan at once preaches peace by saying, "Time enough yet. Life is before you. Don't spoil your pleasures by serious thoughts." Suppose a middle-aged man to be aroused, again comes along the destroyer with the suggestion that now is the time to make money, and the man who fills his head with solemn considerations will fall back in the commercial struggle. "Time enough yet" is once more the text. Or suppose a religious person to become exercised as to whether all is well for eternity, Satan at once protests that one so morally excellent, and so devoutly religious, can have nothing to fear, for all must be well. Yet the wise man has said: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. xiv. 12). The man or woman who is trusting in religion or morality for salvation is building upon sand. Woe to them if they heed the lulling voice saying, "Peace, Peace," when indeed there is no peace.

Hezekiah says in Isa. xxxviii. 17, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness." It is a mercy from God when a false peace is smashed up. The "great bitterness" which results is not pleasant, but it is nevertheless the way to God. See Saul of Tarsus in Acts ix. 9 three whole days unable to eat and drink. When a man goes off his food thus his mind must surely be deeply agitated. The fact is, Saul had made the fearful discovery that with all his blamelessness of life and his religious zeal he was at heart an enemy of God and His Son. The best man of his time saw himself to be "the chief of sinners!" Oh, the bitterness of it? Have we been in the depths thus?

Our first text thus speaks of a false peace; our second tells us of a true peace, proclaimed by the Christ of God. "He came and preached peace," says the apostle, "to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh."

He is manifestly speaking of Christ in resurrection. But what lies behind resurrection? Death. Christ has been down into death, and this on behalf of sinners. At Calvary the storm of divine judgment broke upon His holy head. All the waves and billows of God's wrath rolled over Him. But the storm has spent itself now; sunshine has come, and the Christ who died is alive again from amongst the dead, and glorified on high. The God of peace has brought back from the tomb the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant. He is now righteously able to preach peace to men everywhere. The peace He proclaims is not a mere soporific for the conscience, but the blessed knowledge that every question has been equitably settled by His atoning blood, and that, in consequence, every storm-cloud has been dispelled for ever. "He is our peace," says the apostle. The very fact that He is now accepted in heaven is the public proof that the horizon Godward has been cleared once and for all for those who believe in His name.

Hence the absurdity of bidding a man make his peace with God. The thing is impossible. No man can of himself get rid of a single sin. But in truth there is no peace to make. Christ has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. i. 20), and this He now proclaims to all in the Gospel by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. iv. 25; v. 1).

Would you have peace with God? It is good to be at peace with our fellow-creatures, to feel as we walk up and down the street that there is no enmity between ourselves and a single living soul; but it is better far to be at peace with our God. This happy position may be realized to-day by all who will humble themselves at the divine feet, and consent to be saved by grace alone.

AN IMPERIAL CONVERT.

"Nebuchadnezzar the King unto all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth . . . I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me."

—Dan. iv. 1, 2.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR had recently been exalted to an imperial position by the hand of God. Kings and kingdoms had fallen before him, and he was now supreme amongst the nations. It was God's original purpose to govern and bless the nations of the earth by means of the people of Israel and the house of David; but Israel proving grossly unfaithful, and David's house becoming very evil, this purpose was put aside until the day of Christ, and power was meanwhile placed in Gentile hands. Accordingly Nebuchadnezzar was raised up, and to him was granted "the kingdom, power, and strength and glory."

Dan. iv. gives us the story of his conversion, as related by himself in a proclamation to all his subjects. What is conversion? A change of religious opinions? Nebuchadnezzar's views undoubtedly underwent a complete change. Bel and Nebo were to him gods no more. But conversion is more than this. A man might be severely orthodox in his opinions and yet perish for ever. Conversion is a mighty moral work in the soul whereby a man is turned right about face. One moment he has his back towards God, and the next he finds himself face to face with Him, and he begins to regard sin and judgment as God regards them. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3). Conversion is an absolute necessity for all who would have to do with God in peace and blessing. Have we all experienced it?

Nebuchadnezzar's conversion was as remarkable in its way as that of Saul of Tarsus. There are indeed some points in common in the two cases. Both were persecutors of God's saints; both were stopped abruptly by a voice from heaven; and both published the story of their conversion.

There were three great steps in the dealings of God with Nebuchadnezzar. We find the first in Dan. ii. The vision of the great image, when expounded by Daniel, after all the magicians had acknowledged their impotency, so impressed the King that he exclaimed, "Of a truth it is that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret." He thus acknowledged Jehovah as superior to all other deities, but he was not yet prepared to transfer his allegiance to Him. He was Daniel's God—"your God"; but Nebuchadnezzar was not yet able to call Him "my God." The second step is in Dan. iii. After the marvellous rescue of the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace, the King said: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." There is progress here as compared with chap. ii. He has come to respect Jehovah, and will not allow anyone to speak amiss of Him, but still He does not know Him. He is "the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," but not yet the God of Nebuchadnezzar.

Dan. iv. records the final step, and here we have a complete capitulation. Let me repeat that this chapter

is an imperial proclamation. Such documents are not often read by the people at large, but here is a proclamation which must have excited the deepest interest amongst the many peoples who composed Nebuchadnezzar's empire. The King converted, and then telling the whole story in this public manner! Would that such proclamations were more frequently published. The King's story is very simple. In a dream he saw a mighty tree, with room in its vast branches for the fowls of heaven, and with shadow beneath for the beasts of the field. He also saw a watcher and an holy one come down from heaven directing the tree to be hewn down, with its stump alone remaining. The magicians being helpless as usual, Daniel was called in, who told the King that the tree represented himself, whose ways had been noted in heaven, and who was about to be visited by God in judgment unless he repented. Men forget that there is a Watcher who sees their every act and hears their every word. In Noah's day "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth," and in David's time He looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek God, but could find none that were not wholly unprofitable in His sight (Gen. vi. 5; Psa. xiv. 2-3). How would any of us stand if the word went forth, "Hew down the tree?"

So solemn a dream should have brought Nebuchadnezzar to his knees, but it did not. Yet God, who is long-suffering to all, granted him twelve months' respite before the stroke fell. At the end of that time the King, in all the pride of his heart, walked upon the roof of his palace, and as his magnificent capital with its mighty walls and brazen gates spread itself out before him, he exclaimed: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for

the honour of my majesty?" While the words were yet in his mouth, a voice from heaven said, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee." He was forthwith deprived of his reason, and imagining himself a beast, he was driven out into the fields, where for seven weary years he ate grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. This visitation broke him down utterly, and when reason was graciously restored, he who once impiously said to Shadrach and his fellows, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" now in his proclamation to all his subjects says, "I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever and ever."

Let us individually learn the lesson. Every man must sooner or later come down from his pedestal and prostrate himself at the divine feet. It is happy and wise to do so to-day, and then as lost sinners who have nought of our own to plead seek refuge in the Son of God, the only Saviour. His precious blood suffices to meet the need of the greatest transgressor.

JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST.

“Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”—Zech. iii. 2.

ZECH. iii. gives us the fourth of a series of eight visions which were granted to the prophet on a single night. He was thus shown the whole future history of his people. Israel is yet to be restored to Canaan, all their enemies are to be destroyed, and Jehovah will once more take up His abode in Zion. Our chapter deals with a very important question in connection with all this. Is Israel worthy of such blessing? And if not worthy (as indeed the people are not), on what ground will God grant them such inestimable good? This chapter cannot but be of the deepest interest to all who, in every age, realize that they merit nothing but judgment at the hands of a holy God.

The vision shows us a man in the divine presence. Surely a serious position for anyone. How would we feel to find ourselves there? Job was overwhelmed when he found himself, as it were, face to face with God. “I abhor myself,” cried he, “and repent in dust and ashes.” Isaiah, again, when granted a vision of God, exclaimed, “Woe is me! for I am undone.” In what condition was Joshua found? As High Priest of Israel he was the representative of the people; accordingly his condition was the living picture of that of the people. The Scripture says, “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments.” In what better condition are men found to-day? Our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags; what then our unrighteousnesses? “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Look again at our chapter. Not only was Joshua in the divine presence; Satan was there also, “standing at

his right hand to resist him." It was the great adversary objecting to the exercise of divine mercy. Short shrift should we all receive if left to the compassions of Satan. With energy he denounces men before God, emphasizing their sin and guilt, and protesting against favour being shown to any. There is no more effective minister of righteousness than Satan when it pleases him to play that part.

Now mark the activity of divine grace. No word proceeded from the mouth of Joshua. What indeed could he say? The filth was there, in all its hideousness to the eyes of God. "Every mouth must be stopped," says Rom. iii. 19. Accordingly Joshua said nothing, and did nothing. God took up his cause, and rebuked the foe. "Is not this," said He, "a brand plucked out of the fire?" Like to be burned, but snatched from the burning. This is just the picture of all who believe in the name of Jesus. Next, the Lord commanded, "Take away the filthy garments from him." Then, "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." The garments of Joshua thus represented his iniquity with which the eye of God saw him to be covered from head to foot. Nothing gives our God greater delight than to justify the ungodly. When a sinner takes his true place before Him, confessedly guilty, and without one word to say in self-defence, with joy He says now as of old, "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." The cross of Calvary explains this marvel. The sacrifice of Christ is so divinely efficacious that, on the ground of it, God is righteously able to clear from all charge of guilt, once and for ever, the soul that pleads it before Him.

In Joshua's case there was not only a stripping off; there was also a putting on. "So they set a fair mitre

upon his head, and clothed him with garments." Here let us notice an important distinction. In Zech. iii. 4 iniquities are called "filthy garments"; in Isaiah lxi. 10 righteousnesses are described as "filthy rags." Garments cover us; rags are things with which men seek to cover themselves, but in vain. Our iniquities cover us indeed; to change the figure, not a sound place can God find in our whole moral constitution, as Isaiah i. 6 shews. But when we foolishly seek to cover our nakedness by works of our own, it is but tatters we put on, which in reality cover us not at all. But God puts upon the returning prodigal "the best robe," and that is Christ. As He is, so are we in the divine sight henceforward and for ever.

Mark, God had a direct word for the sinner himself. "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." If God were to keep His purposes of grace locked up in His own great heart, how could any amongst us experience the comfort and blessedness of them? But He has not done this. On the contrary, He has told Himself fully out in the Gospel of His Son. By the testimony of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven we know that He who once suffered for our sins is now accepted on high, and that in consequence "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). John's first epistle was written in order that Christians might have divine certainty as to all things. "That ye may KNOW," is John's characteristic word.

A DIVINE COMPLAINT.

"Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life. . . . There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust."—John v. 40-45.

WE seem to detect something in the nature of a sob in the Saviour's complaint—"Ye will not come to Me." Nothing is more painful than to be made to feel that one is not wanted. Some of us have perhaps had such an experience. But none have known this bitterness like the Son of God. His life on earth was one perpetual snub. He was despised and rejected of men; and, in consequence, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. When He considered what this must involve for those who thus coldly passed Him by His heart groaned within Him. In Luke, xix. 41 we have Him weeping over the blindness and obstinacy of men.

But who was this "Me" to whom men would not come? We learn something as to Him in the first chapter of this Gospel. He is the eternal Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, the One by whom all things were made. Our present chapter tells us more concerning His dignity and glory. He is the quickener of men's souls, the raiser of men's bodies, and the final Judge of all (John v. 25-29). When on earth He was well attested, and divinely recommended. The Baptist bore witness of Him, the Father's voice spoke publicly out of the heavens concerning Him, His own miracles testified to Him with no uncertain sound, and the Scriptures which the people read spoke of Him in their every part. All this He pointed out in the verses which precede our text. Yet with such an One men would have nothing to do. The awfulness of this becomes the more apparent if we think for one moment of all the honours which have been heaped of late upon King George in both East and West. Everyone has been keen to get near him, foreign squadrons acclaim

him on his journey home—scarce a dog moves his tongue against him. Yet when the Sovereign of the universe visited our poor earth He was despised and rejected of men. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John i. 10-11).

What was the character of His mission that men shunned Him thus? Had He come here in majesty and wrath, men, conscious of their guilt, might well have sought cover from Him wherever they could find it. But "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John iii. 17). As our text says, He came that men "might have life." He was standing in the midst of a scene in which sin had long reigned unto death (Rom. v. 21). In order that life might be available for men, He was prepared to give His flesh for the life of the world. So He says in John vi. 51. And yet men did not want Him!

Who were the "ye" who so scornfully refused Him? Men who were the creatures of His hand, and who were moreover the objects of His special favour, for since the days of the Exodus no people had been so privileged as Israel. And what was their condition? They were "the slaves of sin," spite of their false boast that they had never been in bondage to any man (John viii. 33-34). Their peril was thus deadly, and their need great; yet they rejected the Son of God.

But there is another side to this matter. There was one in whom they did put their trust, as the Lord Jesus pointed out in verse 45. Hear them saying in John ix. 28: "Thou art His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples." Moses then was their confidence and boast. Now Moses was a type of Christ in some respects. In his circumstances—as lifted out of the waters of death and set in

association with the throne ; and in his mission, as mediator between God and the people. But in other respects he was a contrast. After the dreadful sin of Israel in the matter of the golden calf, we hear him saying : " Now I will go up unto Jehovah ; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin " (Exo. xxxii. 30). No such language of uncertainty ever rested upon the Saviour's lips. He first made complete atonement for His people's guilt, and then went up on high in the power of it.

John i. 17 shows the contrast between the missions of these two : " The law was given by Moses ; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The law, as 2 Cor. iii. tells us, was a ministration of condemnation and of death, because of the utter inability of sinful flesh to render its righteous requirements. Yet men love the Moses principle ! It is as true as ever what Peter said in Acts xv. 21 : " Moses hath in every city them that preach him." That is, there are those in every quarter who proclaim works as the ground of blessing before God. Men's confidence in Moses is really the expression of their confidence in themselves, for men cling to the notion that there is some good thing in flesh if only a fair chance be given to it.

The rejected Saviour was soon to leave His scornful hearers. Accordingly He warned them of the Antichrist. " I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not ; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive " (John v. 43). The Saviour's voice, now heard in the Gospel, will soon be silent. The next thing will be the last great deception, when men, who would not come to Him that they might have life, will hail with delight the Antichrist of the Devil, to their eternal ruin. Let us ask ourselves how far His bitter complaint applies in our own case.

MAN'S MOUTH.

“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

“Every mouth stopped.”

“With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

“With one mind and one mouth glorify God.”

—Rom. iii. 14, 19; x. 10; xv. 6.

THE mouth both takes in and gives out. It is the avenue to the stomach and the outlet for the heart. The wise man has said: “All the labour of man is for his mouth” (Ecc. vi. 7). In this he spake truly. The Pharisees of our Lord's time were more fastidious concerning that which goes into the mouth than that which comes out of it. Hence their contention with the Lord in Matt. xv. because His disciples ate bread with unwashed hands. In His reply He said: “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” Then, after sternly denouncing the hypocrisy of these religious folk, He added an awful description of what the human heart contains. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,” etc.

It is not my intention on this occasion to run through all the Scripture passages which speak of the mouth. I propose to confine myself to the four passages in the epistle to the Romans in which it is mentioned. These all regard it from the moral side—as the outlet for the heart. In chapter iii. we have the divine indictment of man, presented in a string of quotations from the

Prophets and the Psalms. Amongst them we find these terrible words from Psalm x. : " Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." If the heart did not contain these evils the mouth could never give them forth. Here then we have an insight into the human heart. Let it be noted also that this awful quotation occurs in the apostle's description of religious Jews, not in his account of heathen Gentiles. We are reminded of James' exposure of the inconsistency of the tongue : " Therewith bless we God, even the Father ; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God." It is possible therefore to sing the praises of God on Sunday and be guilty of cursing and bitterness towards men on Monday. Oh, the appalling corruption of the human heart ! Well might the Saviour say : " How can ye, being evil, speak good things ? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh " (Matt. xii. 34). Yet it is one of the hardest of all lessons to learn that the heart of every man is incurably wicked.

But we pass on to Rom. iii. 19. Here the apostle concludes his detailed accusation of the whole human race, Gentiles and Jews alike. " That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." The meaning is that not one single word can be said in extenuation of man's universal condition of guilt and ruin. Not a single reason can be justly assigned why God should not pass sentence forthwith. How would a man feel in whose defence nothing can possibly be urged as he stands in the presence of His Majesty's judge ? This is exactly man's position in relation to God. Convinced he may not be ; convicted he is beyond all controversy. It is a happy thing when a man acknow-

ledges the truth as to himself, and feels constrained to say :—

“ Nothing but mercy will do for me ;
 Nothing but mercy, full and free :
 Of sinners chief, what but the blood
 Could calm my soul before my God ? ”

In Rom. x. we have God's principle of salvation—faith in contrast with works. Two kinds of righteousness are presented to us : “ the righteousness which is of the law ” in verse 5, and “ the righteousness which is of faith ” in verse 6. The first is what men love most, because it gives a place to human effort ; the second, however, is what God sets forth in the Gospel of Christ, and it calls for no human effort at all, but instead magnifies what God and Christ have done. Does any soul long to be saved, crying out with the Jailor of Philippi : “ Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? ” (Acts xvi. 30). Here is God's answer to this tremendous question : “ If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord (R.V.), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” To confess Jesus as Lord is to renounce once for all our own self-will, the root of our every sin. It was a great moment in the history of the writer of the epistle to the Romans when he first lay broken and humbled at the feet of Jesus, and contritely called upon Him as Lord. God demands this from us all as the first step towards eternal blessing. Why does the apostle add, as a second condition, if thou “ shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead ? ” Some perhaps would have preferred him to say, “ If thou shalt believe that Jesus died.” But the apostle does not so express himself. The reason is very simple. Resurrection pre-supposes death. The

two great cardinal truths of the Gospel are given to us in 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4 thus: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . and He was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures." Incidentally it is added, "And He was buried," as if to emphasize the reality of the Saviour's death.

Now see the magnificence of the statement in Rom. x. 9. The Christ who died for the ungodly according to chap. v. 6, has been raised from the dead, and that by the very One to whose righteous throne His great sacrifice was presented as an atonement for our sin and guilt. This is the grand public proof that all the divine claims have been once and for ever satisfied. Thus "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The mouth gives expression to the peace and delight which now prevail in the heart when God becomes known as a Justifier and Saviour.

Our last text is really an exhortation to Christian unity. "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xv. 5-6). Such a passage serves to illustrate the marvellous fruits of God's salvation, when it is known and enjoyed in the soul. It brings together into one holy bond a great variety of persons who, apart from divine grace, would never have wished to know one another at all. Moreover, it enables them to sink their natural selfishness, and walk together in mutual consideration

and love. Occupied not with themselves, nor with one another, they are free to glorify God with one mind and one mouth. Here we have a purifying of the mouth indeed. That which was full of cursing and bitterness in chap. iii. is full of praise in chap. xv. Outward reformation could not effect so great a transformation. The mighty work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, whereby God and Christ become known and appreciated, can alone suffice for it.

"NO DIFFERENCE."

"There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

"There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him."

—Rom. iii. 22, 23; x. 12.

WHEN reading the opening chapters of the epistle to the Romans one seems to be breathing the atmosphere of a court of law. All classes and conditions stand arraigned there. We hear the witnesses called, guilt proved, and then the verdict. In chap. i. 18-32 we have the condition of the Gentile world discussed; that is, the Gentile world as it appeared in the day of the apostle. Debasing idolatry and frightful moral corruption are the charges laid. The witnesses against these transgressors are the things which the Creator has made, whereby are declared His eternal power and Godhead. The sun and the moon in the heavens are a standing protest against idolatry by their perpetual witness to the reality of the supreme God. The Gentile world of the apostle's day finds its answer in the profligates of our own time—those who cast aside all divine restraint, and who not only themselves commit things worthy of death, but take delight in others who do the same.

In chap. ii. 1-16 philosophers are addressed. These could denounce sin and propound good moral ideas, but their lives were no better than those of their fellows. Macaulay, in his essay on Bacon, remarks that "these teachers of virtue had all the vices of their neighbours, with the additional vice of hypocrisy." Wesley, in his "Journal," comments upon Homer's words concerning the liar, "My soul abhors him as the gates of hell," that "he himself, on the slightest pretence, tells deliberately lies over and over." We have moralists in our own time also—men who speak well, but live ill.

But God will not be put off with good words and fair speeches ; He demands reality.

The last class charged in Romans ii. are the Jews. These were the professing people of God, into whose hands the Scriptures had come. They correspond to the multitudes who throng the "places of worship" of to-day. In his arraignment of the Jews the apostle does not cite creation as his witness, but produces passage after passage from their own Scriptures (iii. 10-19). Those who are privileged to possess the Bible in any age must be judged thereby if they do not submit to its holy teaching.

The summing up follows—"every mouth stopped—all the world guilty before God." "There is no difference ; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Let us not misunderstand the apostle here. He does not say all have sinned equally. Some have been so mercifully placed that all the innate devilry of their hearts has not been drawn forth, and this is cause for thankfulness. Our Lord in Luke vii. told of two debtors, one who owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. There was thus a difference in the amount due, but both were on the same level in this respect, that neither had anything wherewith to pay. I was once addressing a congregation of lepers in Barbados, and amongst a number of deplorable cases I observed two smart young men wearing gold watches, and looking the picture of health. At the close of the service I inquired what these were doing in such company, and was told that the dread disease had but recently manifested itself in them. Whatever their general appearance, they were thus lepers like all the rest.

Why does the apostle say, "come short of the glory of God?" The reason is this. Man has lost the earth irremediably ; it is now for him a question of heaven or

hell. But who is able to meet the requirements of God's glory, so as to be free and at home there? In Isaiah vi. we have a man terror-stricken because for one moment he found himself in the presence of the glory of God. There has been but one man in this world whom the glory could acknowledge as worthy of it. To Him there came a voice from the excellent glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Pet. i. 17). In Him then we see what the glory of God requires in a man. Do we correspond to Him? Here alone is the true standard whereby we may measure ourselves aright. Suppose a young man sought entrance amongst his Majesty's guards, it would be vain for him to plead that he is the tallest person in the town if he falls below the fixed standard. In like manner it is useless to compare ourselves with other sinners. The Pharisee of Luke xviii. committed this folly, and in consequence went home unblessed. Sin is a great leveller. God has said it, and from His sentence there is no appeal: "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The religious man and the atheist; the High Conservative and the Socialist; the moral man and the adulterer, stand upon one common platform of guilt before God.

Thus salvation must be altogether of grace; and if of grace, distinctions are impossible. Here our second text comes in most blessedly. The atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus has one value for all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles. The "no difference" doctrine angered the Jewish people deeply. Paul, as its chief exponent, was fiercely persecuted by them on this account. Even Peter, when charged to preach to Cornelius and his company, was slow to admit that the grace of God was for all alike. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Remark in passing one

of the many incidental proofs of the Deity of Christ. This verse is cited from Joel ii. 32, where manifestly the reference is to Jehovah ; in Rom. x. it is applied to the Lord Jesus. Then He is Jehovah ! Were He not, He would not possess the competency to be the Saviour of men. He is moreover " Lord over all." Thus every one must bow to Him, either now or in the great hereafter.

What is required of men in order that they might be saved? Simply to " call " upon the name of the Lord. This was all Israel could do in the midst of their misery in Egypt. To shake off Pharaoh was impossible ; to get rid of the taskmasters was out of the question ; but they could cry to God. In like manner to-day, he who calls upon the name of the Lord, acknowledging Him thus as his only hope, will be saved. To all such He is " rich." The blessings bound up in the salvation of God are neither few nor small ; no creature tongue could declare them in their blessed fulness.

Now turn to a passage in Exod. xi. 7, by way of contrast to this. " Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast : that ye may know how the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." If there is " no difference " amongst men in the matter of guilt, and " no difference " in the dispensing of God's saving grace, there is a difference, deep and eternal, between God's saved ones and all others. As light from darkness, day from night, and life from death, so may be distinguished those who are saved from all who are unsaved. In Exod. xi. it was a question of the judgment of God. The destroyer was about to pass through the land. For the Egyptians there was to be divine judgment, but for Israel none. Christ is the line of demarcation to-day between those who are hastening to eternal doom, and those upon whom no judgment can ever fall. How do we all stand in relation to Him?

“SO GREAT SALVATION.”

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”—Heb. ii. 3.

IN the course of his ministry the apostle had to do with all sorts and conditions of men. He was a chosen vessel unto Christ to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel (Acts ix. 15). His theme everywhere was the same—Christ as the one and only provision of God for the need of men. But his presentation of the theme necessarily varied according to the circumstances of those to whom he addressed himself from time to time. Thus at Lystra, amongst ignorant heathen, we find him speaking of the goodness of the living God in giving men fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness (Acts xiv. 15-17). At Athens, amongst learned heathen, we hear him insisting upon the unity and supremacy of the Creator, and the origin and unity of the human family, and from these truths reasoning against the folly of idolatry (Acts xvii. 21-31). With the heathen he felt constrained to begin upon the very lowest rung of the ladder of truth.

Our text is from the epistle to the Hebrews. These were a people possessed of the Scriptures. For fifteen centuries the Hebrew nation had been in special relationship with God. Their minds were familiar with the many prophetic announcements of the coming Christ, and their eyes had witnessed the offering of multitudes of sacrifices which all pointed to His great atoning work. Moreover, the Saviour Himself had been in their midst. Neither in Rome, nor in Great Britain, was the Saviour born, but in the tiny land of the Hebrews. There He lived, suffered, and died, and from a hill in that most favoured of all lands He ascended into the Father's glory. It was thus to a people who were conversant with

the mightiest of divine facts that the apostle put the solemn question: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Let us dwell awhile upon this word "great." First, how great the *need*! The whole human race in revolt against its Creator! Jew and Gentile, high and low, rich and poor—all brought in guilty in the divine sight. No exceptions admitted anywhere; "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 22-23). Moreover, no man naturally wishful for a different condition of things, for the carnal mind is *enmity* against God (Rom. viii. 7); and to complete the tale of ruin no man able either to help his brother or save himself. How great, then, the need that God should intervene in mercy with salvation for His rebellious creatures.

And how great the *peril*! Man being possessed of the divine inbreathing, he has eternity to face. When the grave is reached every man's condition and destiny becomes unalterable. Men are perishing; let us be quite clear as to this awful fact. Who can estimate what this means? How urgent, then, the need that God should provide a way of salvation for men since none could provide one for themselves.

How great the *Saviour*! Paul in his epistles to Timothy and Titus loves to speak of "God our Saviour." A salvation provided by One so exalted must needs be great and marvellous—worthy of His name. David, in 2 Sam. vii., when meditating upon the divine disclosures concerning himself and his house felt that a "great" God must of necessity do great things for those to whom He manifests His grace. God, then, the One against whom we have sinned, is the One who has undertaken our cause.

How great the *cost* ! Hear it described in the words of the Lord Jesus. " For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life " (John iii. 16). Well might the poet sing :—

" Ours is a pardon bought with blood ;
 Amazing truth ! the blood of One
 Who, without usurpation, could
 Lay claim to heaven's eternal throne."

Nothing could expiate sin but the blood of Christ. Silver and gold are valueless here. Meritorious works and tears of repentance are alike unavailing. Not even the holy life of the Son of God could suffice to bridge the terrible gulf that sin has made between man and his Maker. " Apart from shedding of blood is no remission " (Heb. ix. 22). How evil is Satan's slander that God is an austere person ! Wonder of wonders ! He who seemed to deny an apple to man unfallen has given His Son to man a sinner. Let men beware how they behave in the presence of God's " unspeakable gift." He who refuses the Son of God does so to his eternal loss.

How great the *blessing* ! The salvation of God goes far beyond the mere forgiveness of sins, inestimable as this initial blessing is. The believer in Jesus is washed, sanctified, and justified ; he is brought into the family of God and given a place amongst the many sons ; he becomes an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ ; he is blest with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ ; and presently the whole blood-washed throng will be lifted right out of the present evil world and be set down in the Father's house on high, there to enjoy divine favour and blessing for evermore. Well does the apostle say—" so great salvation ! " What creature tongue

is able to declare what God saves His people from, and all that to which He brings them in Christ our Lord?

Let us now take account of the words which precede our text. "If the word spoken by (or through) angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord," etc. The apostle's first reference is to the law, which was given by angelic ministry at Mount Sinai. Judgment must needs fall upon those who set it at defiance. But if the transgression of the law brought men under judgment, how much more the refusal of grace? Such is the argument. Nothing could be more solemn. The God who would not have His law set at nought can never consent to have His Son treated with contempt.

What must men do in order to perish eternally? Go out and commit some fearful sin, such as would scandalize the town? There is no need to do anything of the kind. People have but to attend the preaching of the Gospel, and neglect to appropriate the Christ of God for themselves in faith, and their ruin is certain for evermore. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" To "reject" is not necessary; to "neglect" is sufficient.

CREATOR: SAVIOUR: FATHER.

"A faithful Creator."—1 Pet. iv. 19.

"God our Saviour."—1 Tim. i. 1.

"God our Father."—1 Tim. i. 2.

GOD is declared to us in three characters in the Holy Scriptures—as Creator, as Saviour, and as Father. In each of these characters we may know Him and confide in Him, if so our hearts desire.

In our time "Creator" has become a merely complimentary title upon men's lips. The theory of evolution represents the various forms of life as we know them to be just developments of lower forms, ever struggling upward in virtue of some power inherent in themselves. This view makes God at best a mere superintendent. That man is an independent creation, absolutely and essentially distinct from every other, is no longer believed by the many. But how does Scripture speak as to this? The sacred oracles most unquestionably represent God as the source and originator of everything—not only of everything that we see, but of "all things that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible" (Col. i. 16). Six times in Gen. i. the word "created" is used of His handiwork. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. xi. 3). Not "by geological research" (good and useful as this may be in its place), but "by faith" we understand. Matter is not eternal; it was created by the hand of God. But, what is of greater moment to us, man also was divinely created. Daniel used no figure of speech when he said to Belshazzar: "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." He was seeking to impress upon the guilty

man the fact that he was a creature of God, with deep responsibilities to Him, which he had never acknowledged. This was the truth which Paul insisted upon with the learned men of Athens in Acts xvii. He quoted with approval their own poet's words, "We are also His offspring," and himself added, "He giveth to all life and breath and all things." To these learned dreamers the apostle judged it necessary to teach that man came forth from the workshop of the Almighty. The process is described in Gen. i. ii. First we hear God saying, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," and then we have the different stages in the work. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." The divine Potter first formed the body, and then into the inanimate frame He breathed His own breath. Man is thus a being totally distinct in nature and character from every other creature of God's hand.

"God our Saviour" is a wonderful title. It is found only in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. That He should Himself seek to save rebels against His own majesty is a marvel indeed. Though there is infinite variety in God's works, He has only been pleased to create two orders of moral beings—angels for the heavens and men for the earth. Both of these have revolted against Him. For angels He has provided no Saviour; for men He has. Who can explain so great a mystery? He was under no obligation to save any of His rebellious creatures. He might have declared Himself "God our Judge" to men as to angels. But the Incarnate Son has told us: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the

world through Him might be saved" (John iii. 16-17). And so "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Tit. ii. 11). "The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man has appeared," as we read in another place. "God our Saviour" is not so familiar a thought to some as "Jesus our Saviour." The popular conception is a severe God, and a gracious Jesus. Popery goes even further in its misrepresentation, making even Jesus severe, and needing words from Mary to render Him favourable to sinners. "God our Saviour" means that the very One against whom we have transgressed has in His great love Himself provided all that His throne demanded. Who would distrust such a God?

Some were falsifying the Gospel in the apostle's day by preaching the law. Of these he says contemptuously: "Understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Tim. i. 7). In the same way would he speak of the religious leaders of our own time who put men under law, and encourage them to go into the presence of God with vows upon their lips which none are able to perform. The Gospel reveals Him, not as an exactor, but as a giver. It is a solemn thing to falsify His testimony.

Now if it be indeed true that "God is our Saviour, and that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared," the question arises, are we saved? Paul could say in 2 Tim. i. 9, "Who hath saved us," and in 1 Tim. i. he blesses God for saving the chief of sinners. Can you thank God for the same inestimable blessing?

We read in our third text, "God our Father." Not the great universal Father, as some say, coupling with it the idea of the universal brotherhood of man. This is not God's truth, but one of Satan's most dangerous lies. He is the Father of all who believe in the Lord Jesus, but

of no others. His name of Father was revealed by the Son. Israel knew Him as *Jehovah*, and the early patriarchs as the Almighty; we are privileged to know Him as Father. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John i. 18). But the unfolding was gradual. During His earthly ministry He taught His disciples to say "Our Father, which art in heaven," and "heavenly Father," but these titles do not express the full grace of Christianity. Not until He was risen from the dead did He say "My brethren," and "My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (John xx. 17). Such words put all His own into His place and relationship with His Father and God. Godward we are "many sons;" Christward we are "many brethren," amongst whom He is Firstborn. Well might the apostle say: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God" (1 John iii. 1). The Lord's own touching parable in Luke xv. shows how the Father delights to lavish His love upon those who come to Him in repentance. His love as "God our Saviour" is a love of compassion; His love as "God our Father" is a love of tenderest relationship.