

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PASTOR'S RETURN.

THREE SPECIALLY-SELECTED SERMONS

TO HIS

CHURCH, CONGREGATION, READERS, AND FRIENDS,

CONSISTING OF

A RETROSPECT, A PROSPECT, AND AN EXHORTATION.

RETROSPECT—"THE LORD HATH BLESSED."

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto."—Joshua xvii. 14.

It is not an easy task to divide land amongst different claimants. Joshua divided Canaan with strict impartiality. He was a man of God, and he was also shrewdly wise, as you may gather from many of his speeches. But, for all that, he could not satisfy everybody. He who would please all attempts the impossible. God himself is quarrelled with. If it be the design of providence to please men, it is a melancholy failure. Do we not find men everywhere dissatisfied with their portions? This man would like his lot if it were not where it is, and that man would be perfectly satisfied if he had a little more. One would be contented with what he has if he could keep it always, while another would be more pleased if life could be shortened. There is no pleasing men. We are like the sons of Joseph in the chapter before us, ready to complain of our inheritance. It should not be so. We who have pined in the wilderness of sin should rejoice that we have entered the land of promise, and we ought to be glad to have a portion among the people of the Lord. Contentment should be natural to those who are born of the Spirit of God; yea, we ought to go beyond contentment, and cry, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits."

Brethren, the best advice that I can give to each man among you is, that he should endeavour to make the best of the portion which God has given him: for, after all, *Joshua* had not arbitrarily appointed

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Ephraim and Manasseh their lots, but they had fallen to them by the decree of God. Their portions had been marked out by a higher hand than Joshua's long before. You and I ought to believe that—

“There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

Let us fall back upon predestination, and accept the grand truth that “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” An all-wise God disposes his people according to his sovereign will. Let us not seek to alter our destiny, but let us try to make the best of our circumstances. This is what Joshua exhorted Ephraim and Manasseh to do. “You have a hill country crowned with forests: hew them down. You have fat valleys occupied by Canaanites: drive out the present inhabitants.” O sirs, if we would but thoroughly enjoy what God has freely given us, we should be happy to the full, and even anticipate the joys of heaven. We have a deep river of delights in the covenant of grace, yet we are content to paddle about its shores. We are only up to our ankles, the most of us, whereas the waters are “waters to swim in.” A great sun of everlasting love shines upon the globe of our life with tropical force, but we get away to the North Pole of doubt and fear, and then complain that the sun has such little heat, or that he is so long below the horizon. He who will not go to the fire ought not to complain that the room is cold. Did we heartily feed upon what the Lord has set on our table, accept the ring which he has prepared for our finger, and wear the garments which he has provided for our comfort, we might here on earth make music and dancing before the Lord.

I am going to speak upon my text thus: First, here is *a confession*, which I think many of us will be very happy to make: “Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto.” Secondly, here is *an argument*, which is stated after the manner of logic: “Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto, therefore,” so and so.

I. We look at our text, then, first of all, as A CONFESSION—“The Lord hath blessed me hitherto.”

I will not at present speak to those of you upon whom the blessing of God has never rested. Remember, my dear hearers, that every man is either under the curse or under the blessing. They that are of the works of the law are under the curse. Those upon whom their sin is resting are under the curse, for a curse always attends upon sin. Though we read no commination service; though we do not speak to you from Ebal and Gerizim, with the blessing and the curse; yet rest assured that there is before the living God a separation of the precious from the vile, and each day there is a judgment which, in God's apprehension, puts some upon the right hand with the “Come, ye blessed,” and others upon the left hand with the “Depart, ye cursed.” This will be finally done in “that day of days for which all other days were made.” At this hour, my hearer, if you are not the blessed of the Lord, you are resting under the dark shadow of a curse from which I pray God you may at once escape. Faith in him who was made a curse for us is the only way to the blessing.

But I speak to as many as have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Lord saith, “Surely, blessing I will bless thee.”

You can say at this time, "God hath blessed me *hitherto*." He has blessed you with those *blessings which are common to all the house of Israel*. Ephraim and Manasseh had received a blessing when God blessed Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, seeing they were in the loins of Abraham. You and I, who are in Christ, are partakers of all covenant-blessings in Christ Jesus. "If children, then heirs"; and if we are children of God, then we are heirs of all things. I like to think of the old Scotchwoman, who not only blessed God for the porridge as she ate it, but thanked God that she had a covenant-right to the porridge. Daily mercies belong to the Lord's household by covenant-right; and that same covenant-right which will admit us into heaven above also gives us bread and water here below. The trifles in the house, and the jewels of the house, equally belong to the children. We may partake of the common mercies of providence, and the extraordinary mercies of grace, without stint. None of the dainties of the royal house are locked up from the children. The Lord says to each believer, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," and therefore "all things are yours."

Can you not say—"The Lord hath blessed me *hitherto*"? Has he ever denied you one of the blessings common to the covenanted family? Has he ever told you that you may not pray, or that you may not trust? Has he forbidden you to cast your burden on the Lord? Has he denied to you fellowship with himself and communion with his dear Son? Has he laid an embargo on any one of the promises? Has he shut you out from any one of the provisions of his love? I know that it is not so if you are his child, but you can heartily exclaim "The Lord hath blessed me *hitherto*." "Such honour have all the saints." By his gracious past of love the Lord guarantees to his redeemed a future of equal blessedness, for his loving-kindness never departs from those on whom it lights.

But then, dear friends, besides this, Ephraim and Manasseh had *special blessings*, the peculiar blessing of Joseph, which did not belong to Judah, or Reuben, or Issachar. In the end of the Book of Genesis, you will see how Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, and you will observe with what prodigality of benediction he enriched them amongst his sons. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." Moses also, ere he died, seemed to glow with a divine fervour when he came to the tribe of Joseph, and blessed him in some respects above his brethren. Now, I think that many of you may say, "Though I am least of all his saints, yet in some respects the Lord hath specially blessed me *hitherto*." I believe that every flower in a garden, which is tended by a wise gardener, could tell of some particular care that the gardener takes of it. He does for the dahlia what he does not for the sunflower; somewhat is wanted by the rose that is not required by the lily; and the geranium calls for an attention which is not given to the honey-suckle. Each flower wins from the gardener a special culture. The vine has a dressing all its own, and the apple-tree a pruning peculiar to itself. There is a blessing of the house of Manasseh, and a blessing of the house of Ephraim; and so is there a special benediction for each child of God. All the names of the tribes were written on the breastplate, but there was a different

colour in the jewel allotted to each tribe; and I believe that there is a speciality of grace about every child of God. There is not only an election from the world, but an election out of the elect. Twelve were taken from the disciples; three were taken out of the twelve; one greatly beloved was taken out of the three. Uniformity of love does not prevent diversity of operations. As a crystal is made up of many crystals, so is grace composed of many graces. In one ray of the light of grace there are seven colours. Each saint may tell his fellow something that he does not know; and in heaven it will be a part of the riches of glory to hold commerce in those specialities which each one has for himself alone. I shall not be you, neither will you be me; neither shall we twain be like another two, or the four of us like any other four, though all of us shall be like our Lord when we shall see him as he is. I want you each to feel at this hour—"The Lord hath blessed *me* hitherto." Personally, I often sit me down alone, and say, "Whence is this to me?" I cannot but admire the special goodness of my Lord to me. Sister, have you never done the same? Have you not said to yourself, in deep humility, "Surely, I have been a woman highly favoured"? Do you not, my brother, often feel that the name given to Daniel might be given to you, "O man greatly beloved"? Perhaps you are greatly tried; but then, you have been graciously sustained. Perhaps you are free from troubles; then you are bound to bless the Lord for a smooth path. A peculiarity of love colours each gracious life. As God is truly everywhere, yet specially in certain places, so does he manifest his love to all his people, and yet each one enjoys a speciality of grace. "The Lord hath blessed *me* hitherto."

I think, besides this, that these two tribes which made up the house of Joseph, also meant to say that, not only had God blessed them with the common blessings of Israel, and the special blessing of their tribe, but also with *actual blessings*. As far as they had gone they had driven out the Canaanites, and taken possession of the country. They had not received all that was promised; but God had blessed them *hitherto*. Come, brethren, we have not driven out all the Canaanites yet, but we have driven out many of them. We are not what we hope to be, but we are not what we used to be. We cannot yet see everything clearly, but we are not blind, as once we were. We have not overcome every sinful propensity, but no sin has dominion over us, for we are not under the law, but under grace. We do not know all that the Lord will yet teach us, but what we do know we would not lose for ten thousand worlds. We have not seen our Lord as he is, but we have seen him; and the joy of that sight will never be taken from us. Therefore, before the Lord and his assembled people, we joyfully declare that "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto."

Let us expand this confession a little, and speak thus:

First, *all the blessings that we have received have come from God*. Do not let us trace any blessing to ourselves, or to our fellow-men; for though the minister of God may be as a conduit-pipe to bring us refreshing streams, yet all our fresh springs are in God, and not in men. Say, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Trace up every stream to the fountain, every beam to the sun, and say "I will bless the Lord as long as I live, for *he* has blessed me. Every good gift which has come to me

has come from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Trite as the thought is, we have often to recall God's people to the confession—that all the blessings of the covenant come from the God of the covenant.

The Lord has given each one of us a great multitude of blessings. He has blessed us in his promises. Oh, that we did but know how rich we are! He has blessed us in his providence,—in the brightness and in the darkness of it, in its calms and in its storms, in its harvests and in its famines. He has blessed us by his grace. I shall not dwell upon these themes; I should want a century for my sermon, if I did. But he has blessed you, beloved, who are in Christ, with all heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus, according as he hath chosen you in him from before the foundation of the world. Never will you be able to reckon up, even in eternity, the total sum of the benedictions which God has bestowed upon you in promise, in providence, and in grace. He has given you "all blessings" in Christ, and that is the short way of putting it. He has given you more than you know of, more than you have asked for, more than you can estimate. He has given you not only many things, but all things, in Christ Jesus, and he has declared that "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." The Lord hath, indeed, blessed us hitherto.

And, mark you, there has been a continuity of this blessing. God has not blessed us, and then paused; but he has blessed us "*hitherto*." One silver thread of blessing extends from the cradle to the grave. "He hath blessed us hitherto." When we have provoked him; when we have backslidden from him; when we have been making an ill use of his blessings; yet he has kept on blessing us with a wondrous perseverance of love. I believe in the perseverance of the saints, because I believe in the perseverance of the love of God, or else I should not believe in it. The Lord himself puts it so—"I am God, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." There is an unconquerable pertinacity in the love of God: his grace cannot be baffled or thwarted, or turned aside; but his goodness and his mercy follow us all the days of our lives.

In addition to that continuity, there is a delightful consistency about the Lord's dealings. "The Lord hath *blessed* us hitherto." No curse has intervened. He has blessed us, and only blessed us. There has been no "yea" and "nay" with him; no enriching us with spiritual blessings, and then casting us away. He has frowned upon us, truly; but his love has been the same in the frown as in the smile. He has chastened us sorely; but he has never given us over unto death.

And, what is more, when my text says, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto," there is a kind of prophecy in it, for "*hitherto*" has a window forward as well as backward. You sometimes see a railway carriage or truck, fastened on to what goes before; but there is also a great hook behind. What is that for? Why, to fasten something else behind, and so to lengthen the train. Any one mercy from God is linked on to all the mercy that went before it; but provision is also made for adding future blessing. All the years to come are guaranteed by the ages past. Did you ever notice how the Bible ends? It closes with that happiest of conclusions, marriage and happiness. The marriage of the Lamb is

come, and his bride hath made herself ready. Infinite felicity closes the volume of revealed history. Earthquakes, and falling stars, and the pouring out of vials, follow with terrible speed; but it all ends in everlasting bliss and eternal union. Even thus shall it be with us, for the Lord hath blessed us hitherto.

Hitherto—*hitherto*—he has blessed us; and it implies that he always will bless us. Never will the silver stream of his love cease to flow. Never will the ocean of his grace cease to wash the shores of our life. He is, he must be, to his people the blessed and blessing God. “Surely blessing I will bless thee,” is a word of Jehovah that stands fast for ever and ever. Thus far is our confession of gratitude.

II. Now we come to THE ARGUMENT, which I wish to press home upon all my dear brethren and sisters in Christ. The tribe of Joseph says, “Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto.”

What is the inference from that fact? The argument that the sons of Joseph wanted to draw was peculiarly Jewish; it was the inference of business. It was the plea that they should have more because they had so much: because they had one lot, therefore they were to have two portions in the promised land. I want no man to infer that, because God has blessed him in providence, he is to expect to have still more riches, and still more pleasure. Ah, no! Do not wish to have your portion in this life, lest you get it; for then you will be as the ungodly.

Their argument, again, was one of grumbling. They said, “God has blessed us hitherto”; as much as to say, “If we do not get two portions, we shall not say that God is still blessing us; but we will draw a line, and say *hitherto*.” God has many very naughty children; they fall into quarrels with their heavenly Father. “Ever since that dear child died,” says one, “I never felt the same towards God.” “Ever since my mother was taken away,” cries another, “I have always felt that I could not trust God as I used to do.” This is shocking talk. Have done with it. If you quarrel with God, he will say to you, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” There is no happiness but in complete submission. Yield, and all will end well; but if you stand out against the Most High, it is not God’s rod that makes you smart; it is a rod of your own making. End this warfare by saying, “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.” Do not say, “He blessed me up to a certain point, and then he changed his hand.” This is a most slanderous falsehood.

Let us say rather, “The Lord has blessed me hitherto, and this is cause for *holy wonder* and amazement. Why should the Lord have blessed me?”

“Pause, my soul! Adore and wonder!

Ask, ‘Oh, why such love to me?’

Grace hath put me in the number

Of the Saviour’s family:

Hallelujah!

Thanks, eternal thanks to Thee.”

We read in 2 Samuel vii. 18, 19, “Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And is this the manner

of man, O Lord God?" Thus let each one of us be amazed at the great loving-kindness of the Lord.

Be full of *holy gratitude*. Do not say, "I will look on the bright side." Beloved, the Lord's ways to us are all bright. Do not say, "I will trust God where I cannot trace him," but rather trace God everywhere. Get into the state of that poor man who was so greatly blessed to pious Tauler. He wished the man a good day. The man replied, "Sir, I never had a bad day." "Oh, but I wish you good weather." Said he, "Sir, it is always good weather. If it rains or if it shines, it is such weather as God pleases, and what pleases God pleases me."

Our sorrows lie mainly at the roots of our selfishness, and when our self-hood is dug up, our sorrow to a great extent is gone. Let us, then, utter this text to-night, "Forasmuch as the Lord hath blessed me hitherto," with hearty gratitude for all his holy will. Summing up gains and losses, joys and griefs, let us say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

Say also, with *holy confidence*, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." Speak as you find. If any enquire, "What has God been to you?" answer, "He hath blessed me hitherto." The devil whispers, "If thou be the son of God"; and he then insinuates, "God deals very hardly with you. See what you suffer. See how you are left in the dark!" Answer him, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life; and if God takes from me any earthly good, shall I receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall I not receive evil?" He who can stand to this stands on good ground. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But he that gets away from this drifts I know not where. Come, let us each one bless the Lord, and say, "If he should treat me hardly in the future, I will still praise him for what he has done hitherto." I remember saying to myself, when I was in sorrow for sin, that if God would only forgive me my sin, and give me rest from my despair, if I had to live in a dungeon on bread and water, all the rest of my life, I would do nothing else but sing to his praise." I am afraid that I have not fulfilled that promise; but I confess my wrong in not having done so. You, my brethren, I dare say, made much the same spiritual covenant with God, and you have not stood to it. Let us unite our sincere confessions, and say, each one, "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto; therefore blessed be his name."

Furthermore, if this be true, let us resolve to *engage in enlarged enterprises*. If the Lord has blessed us hitherto, why should he not bless us in something fresh? I want to say somewhat to you as a church, dear friends, for the text is a church-text, and the "me" here comprehends all the tribe of Joseph. Let us joyfully say as a church, "The Lord hath blessed us hitherto." Strangers will excuse us if we have a little mutual joy in what the Lord has done for us during a considerable period of time. Those who have been with me from our earliest days, when we were a mere handful of people, may well rejoice that the Lord taught us to pray, and to trust, when we were so few and feeble, and then he visited us with favour, and greatly multiplied us; and since then he has continued to bless us without pause or stint. These thirty-three years he has been with us, we have never been

without conversions, never without fresh labour for Christ, and fresh projects, and never a failure, never a schism, or a division of heart. I am amazed and humbled by the Lord's goodness. We have gone from strength to strength in the Lord's work. I have been feeble, and I fear I may be so still; but the Lord has not ceased to work by you who are with me. Well, what then? College, Orphanage, Colportage, Evangelists, Mission Halls—thirty-four of them, Sunday-schools, and so forth. What then? "Stop," says the devil. You would like us to stop, would you not, foul fiend? But we shall do nothing of the kind. Wherever you are, O fiend, in this city, it is our business and our desire to fight with you, and drive you out! We cannot cease to be active; for the Lord has blessed us hitherto. "You will get meddling with too much, and get too many irons in the fire." None of them in *your* fire, O Satan! Brethren, we must have more fire, and more irons in it! I beseech you, do not slacken in any way, but press on. Let us do more. Have I an alabaster-box anywhere? Is it lying by? Perhaps the odours may begin to ooze out. It is not safe in the drawer. It may get cracked and broken. Let me have the privilege of breaking it myself, and pouring it on my Master's feet, that I may anoint them with the most precious thing I have. Can you not think of something you could do for Jesus, each one of you personally? Cannot the whole church say to itself, "We must keep our institutions going at a greater rate for Christ's sake"? The world is very dark, and wants more light; the poor are very hungry, and need bread; and the ignorant are very faint to know more.

Did you say, "Now, do not project anything"? I do not know that I shall, but at the same time, I am not sure that I shall not. If the Lord has blessed us hitherto, let us go a little further. When certain brethren raise a stone of Ebenezer, they sit down on it. That is not what the stone is meant for. I have a commission to put spikes on the top of those stones. You must not dream of sitting down upon,—“Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” The voice from the throne saith, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.” Though the sea roll before you, forward! Forward, in God's name! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Joshua xvii.

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