

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE ROYAL PREROGATIVE.

A Sermon

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"He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death. But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."—Psalm lxxviii. 20, 21.

WHATEVER may be said of the Old Testament dispensation, however dimly it may have revealed certain truths, there was one matter about which it was clear as the sun. Under the Old Testament economy the Lord God of Israel is ever most conspicuous. God is in all, and over all; and from the pages of the prophets, as well as from the lips of the temple choirs, we hear loudly sounding forth the note, "The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Hallelujah!" By priest and prophet, saint and seer, the one testimony is borne, "The Lord reigneth." You cannot read the Book of Job without trembling in the majestic presence of the Almighty; nor can you turn to the Psalms without being filled with solemn awe as you see David, and Asaph, and Heman adoring the Lord, who made heaven and earth and the sea. Everywhere, from Abraham to Malachi, man is of small account, and God is all in all. Very little consideration is given to any fancied rights and claims of man, but wonder is expressed that the Creator should be mindful of him. We read no discourse upon the dignity of human nature, or upon the beauty of human character; but God alone is holy, and when he looks from heaven he sees none that doeth good, no, not one. Man is rolled in the dust from which he sprang, and to which he must return; all his pride is cut down, and his comeliness withered, and over all is seen one God, and none beside him.

It will be a great offence if, coming into the brighter light of the New Testament, we are less vivid in our conceptions of the glory of God. If God should be less clearly seen in the person of our Lord Jesus, than he was under the symbols of the law, it will be the fault of our blinded hearts. It will be ill for us to turn day into night, and like owls to see less because the light is increased. Let it not be so among us, but let it be in our churches as in Israel of old, of which it was said, "in Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel." "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the

prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," and by him as the incarnate Word he has revealed himself with a sevenfold splendour, and therefore it should be our soul's great delight to perceive God in all things, to rejoice in his presence, and to magnify him in all things as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Psalmist in this particular case ascribes to the Lord universal action and power over us, for he ascribes to him the mercies of life and the issues of death. He says, "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits." The Lord heaps up his favours till their number loads the memory, and their value burdens the shoulders of gratitude. He gives us so many mercies that the mind is burdened in endeavouring to calculate their worth : we are overwhelmed with a sense of his goodness, and the consciousness that we cannot return any adequate thanks for such abundance of daily grace. Such is our God in life, and what will he be in death? Shall we be without him there? No, blessed be his name, "Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." His kingdom includes the land of death-shade, and all the borders thereof. We shall not die without his permit, nor without his presence. Though temporal mercies will find their end when life ends, yet are there eternal mercies which throughout eternal life shall manifest the goodness of the Most High ; and meanwhile by rescues, recoveries, and escapes we shall be preserved from prematurely descending to the tomb. If any of you, dear friends, have been brought near to the gates of death, if you have been laid low by wearisome sickness, if your heart has sunk within you in a sort of mental death, you will in coming back to health and strength most heartily bless the Lord who finds for us a way of return from the suburbs of the sepulchre. He is not only the God of life but the God of death ; he keeps us in life, and makes life happy ; he keeps us from death and from the fierce agencies which wait to drag us to the grave. There are issues out of the dark border-land of sickness, and peril, and despair, and the Lord leads us by his own right hand to cause us to escape. Doth he not say "I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea"? We must, and we will praise him for this with a new song.

I gather from our text that death is in the hand of God, that escapes from death are manifestations of his divine power, and that he is to be praised for them.

The outline of this morning's discourse, as indicated by the text, is just this: first, *the sovereign prerogative of God*, "To God the Lord belong the issues from death": secondly, *the character of the sovereign* with whom this prerogative is lodged, "He that is our God is the God of salvation": and then, thirdly, *the solemn warning which this great sovereign gives* in reference to the exercise of his prerogative; weighty are the words, may the Holy Spirit cause us to feel their power—"God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

I. First, then, with deep reverence let us speak upon **THE SOVEREIGN PREROGATIVE OF GOD**—"Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death." Kings have been accustomed to keep the power of life and death in their own hands. The great King of kings, the sovereign Ruler and absolute Lord of all worlds reserves this to himself,—that he

shall permit men to die, or shall give them an issue from death at his own good will and pleasure. He can alike create and destroy. He sendeth forth his Spirit and they are created, and at his own pleasure he saith, "Return, ye children of men," and lo! they fall before him like autumn's faded leaves.

The prerogative of life or death belongs to God in a wide range of senses. First of all as to natural life, we are all dependent upon his good pleasure. We shall not die until the time which he appoints; for our death-time, like all our time, is in his hands. Our skirts may brush against the portals of the sepulchre, and yet we shall pass the iron gate unharmed if the Lord be our guard. The wolves of disease will hunt us in vain until God shall permit them to overtake us. The most desperate enemies may waylay us, but no bullet shall find its billet in any heart unless the Lord allows it. Our life does not even depend upon the care of angels, nor can our death be compassed by the malice of devils. We are immortal till our work is done, immortal till the immortal King shall call us home to the land where we shall be immortal in a still higher sense. When we are most sick, and most ready to faint into the grave, we need not despair of recovery, since the issues from death are in Almighty hands. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up." When we have passed beyond the skill of the physician we have not passed beyond the succour of our God, to whom belong the issues from death.

Spiritually, too, this prerogative is with God. We are by nature under the condemnation of the law on account of our sins, and we are like criminals tried, convicted, sentenced, and left for death. It is for God, as the great Judge, to see the sentence executed, or to issue a free pardon, according as he pleases; and he will have us know that it is upon his supreme pleasure that this matter depends. Over the head of a universe of sinners I hear this sentence thundering, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Shut up for death, as men are by reason of their sins, it rests with God to pardon whom he may reserve; none have any claim to his favour, and it must be exercised upon mere prerogative, because he is the Lord God, merciful and gracious, and delighteth to pass by transgression and sin.

So, too, doth the Lord deliver his own believing people from those "deaths oft" which make up their experience. Though we are in Christ Jesus delivered from death as a penalty, yet we often feel an inward death, caused by the old nature, which exercises a deadening influence within us. We feel the sentence of death in ourselves that we may not trust in ourselves, but in Jesus, in whom our life is hid. It may be that for a season our joys are damped, our spiritual vigour is drained away, and we hardly know whether we have any spiritual life left within us. We become like the trees in winter, whose substance is in them but the sap ceases to flow, and there is neither fruit nor leaf to betray the secret life within. We scarcely feel a spiritual emotion in these sad times, and dare not write ourselves among the living in Zion. At such times God the Lord can give us back the fulness of life, he can restore our soul from the pit of corruption and cause us not only to have life but to have it more abundantly. The issues from death are with the quickening

Spirit; and when our soul cleaveth to the dust he can revive us again till we rejoice with joy unspeakable.

As the climax of all, when we shall come actually to die, and these bodies of ours shall descend into the remorseless grave, as probably they will, in the hands of our Redeeming Lord are the issues from death. The archangel is even now waiting for the signal: one blast of his trumpet shall suffice to gather the chosen from all lands, from the east and from the west, from the south and from the north. Then death itself shall die away, and the righteous shall arise

“From beds of dust and silent clay
To realms of everlasting day.”

“I am the resurrection and the life,” saith Christ, and he is both of these to all his people. Is he not life, for he saith, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”? Is he not resurrection, for he saith, “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”? That bright illustrious day in which the saints shall rise with their Lord will show how unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.

Our translation is a very happy one, because it bears so many renderings, and includes not only escape from death, deliverance from condemnation, revival from spiritual death, and uplifting from deadly mental depression, but recovery from death’s direct havoc, by our being raised again from the tomb. In all these respects the Lord Jesus hath the key of death; he openeth and no man shutteth, he shutteth and no man openeth.

Concerning this prerogative we may say, first, that to God belongs *the right to exercise it*. This right springs, first, from his being our Creator. He saith “all souls are mine.” He has an absolute right to do with us as he pleases, seeing he hath made us, and not we ourselves. Men forget what they are, and boast great things; but truly they are but as clay on the potter’s wheel, and he can fashion them or can break them as he pleases. They think not so, but he knoweth their thoughts, that they are vain. Oh the dignity of man! What a theme for a sarcastic discourse! As the frog in the fable swelled itself till it burst asunder, so doth man in his pride and envy against his Maker, who nevertheless sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, and reckoneth men as though they were grasshoppers, and regardeth whole nations of them as the small dust of the balance. The Lord’s prerogative of creation is manifestly widened morally by our forfeiture of any consideration which might have arisen out of obedience and rectitude if we had possessed them. Our fault has involved forfeiture of the creature’s claims, whatever they may have been. We are all attainted of high treason, and we have each one been guilty of personal rebellion, and therefore we have not the rights of citizens, but lie under sentence of condemnation. What saith the infallible voice of God? “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” We have come under this curse; justice has pronounced us guilty, and by nature we abide under condemnation. If then the Lord shall be pleased to deliver us from death it rests with him to do so, but we have no right to any such deliverance, nor can we urge any argument which would avail in the courts of justice for reversal of sentence or stay of

execution. Before the bar of justice our case must go hard if we set up any plea of right. We shall be driven away with the disdain of the impartial Judge if we urge our suit upon that line. Our wisest course is to appeal to his mercy and to his sovereign grace, for there alone is our hope. Understand me clearly: if the Lord shall suffer us all to perish we shall only receive our deserts, and we have not one of us a shade of claim upon his mercy: we are therefore absolutely in his hands, and to him belong the issues from death.

This right of God to save is further made manifest by the redemption of his people. It might have been said that God had no right to save if by saving he would abridge his justice; but now that he hath laid help upon one that is mighty, and his only-begotten Son has become a victim in our place, to magnify the law and make it honourable, the Lord God hath an unquestionable right to deliver from death his own redeemed, for whom the Substitute has died. Our God saves his people in consistency with justice: no one can question his doing right even when he justifies the ungodly. His right and power over the issues from death are in the case of his own blood-bought ones clear as the sun at noon-day, and who shall dispute with him?

Our text, however, puts the prerogative upon the one sole ground of lordship, and we prefer to come back to that. "Unto God *the Lord* belong the issues from death." It is a doctrine which is very unpalatable in these days, but one nevertheless which is to be held and taught, that God is an absolute sovereign, and doeth as he wills. The words of Paul may not be suffered to sleep,—“Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” The Lord cannot do amiss, his perfect nature is a law unto itself. In his case *Rex* is *Lex*, the King is the law. He is the source and fountain of all right, truth, rule, and order. Being absolutely perfect within himself, and comprehending all things, it is not possible for him to do otherwise than right. He is goodness, truth, and righteousness itself, and therefore the prerogatives of his throne are not bounded, and to the Lord of heaven and earth belong the issues from death.

Enough with regard to that matter of right. I go on to notice that *the Lord has the power of this prerogative*. With him is the ability to deliver men from natural death. Jehovah Rophi is a physician who is never baffled. Medicines may fail, but not the great Maker of all plants and herbs and useful drugs. Study and experience may be at a nonplus, but he who fashioned the human frame knows its most intricate parts, and can soon correct its disorders. God can restore when a hundred diseases are upon us all at once. Take courage, thou fainting one, and look up. Certainly, as to the soul, there is no case of man so far gone that God cannot find an issue out of its death. He can cast out seven devils, and a legion of diabolical sins. To God the Lord belong the issues from death, however foul the sin, and however forlorn the condition caused by transgression. He who raised Lazarus from the grave after four days can raise the most corrupt from the grave of their iniquities. O that awakened sinners would believe this!

I remember reading of an aged minister who had for some years fallen into deep despondency. He gave up his pulpit, and kept himself very

much alone, always writing bitter things against himself. At last, when he was on a sick bed, a servant of God was sent to him, who dealt wisely with him. This good man said to the despairing one, "Brother, do you believe that passage, 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him'?" "I believe it," said he, "with all my heart, but I am convinced—" Here the other stopped him, "I do not ask what your convictions may be, nor what your feelings may be, but I come to say to you, the man who trusts that promise lives." This plain declaration of the gospel was made by the divine Comforter the means of supreme consolation to the despairing one; may it be equally useful to all those who hear it. He who can hang his soul's hope upon the infinite ability of Christ to save is a saved man. He that believeth on him hath everlasting life. What a blessing this is! The devil may tell me that I never can issue out of deserved death, and that I am shut up for ever under the just results of my trespasses; my own conscience knowing my undeservingness may also condemn me a thousand times over; but unto God the Lord belong the issues from death, and he can and will pluck me from between the jaws of death since I believe in him. He is able to bring up those whom he ordains to save even from the utmost depths of despair. The absolute right of God is supported by almighty power, and thus his prerogative is made a matter of fact.

Nor is this all, *the Lord has actually exercised this prerogative in abundant cases.* As to those issues from death which are seen in restoration from sickness, I need not remind you that these are plentiful enough. At times these have come in a miraculous form, as when Hezekiah had his life lengthened in answer to prayer, and when many others were healed by the Saviour and his apostles. Life has been preserved in a lion's den, and in the belly of a fish, in a fiery furnace, and in the heart of the sea. Death has no arrow in his quiver which can hurt the man whom God ordains to live. Out of imminent peril the Lord still delivers in the ordinary course of providence, and there are persons present this morning who are proofs of his interposing power. He has raised some of us from prostration of body and depression of spirit, he has rescued others from shipwreck and fire in very singular ways, and here we are, living to praise God, as we do this day.

God has exercised this prerogative spiritually. In what a myriad of cases has he delivered souls from death! Ask yon white-robed hosts in heaven, "Has not God displayed in you his sovereign power to save?" Ask many here below, who have tasted that he is gracious, and they will tell, "He saved me." According to his mercy he has issued a free pardon, signed by his royal hand, saying, "Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom." Why his sovereignty has interposed to rescue us from death we cannot tell. We often ask, "Why was I made to hear his voice? How was it that I was made to live?" But we are silent with grateful wonder, and invent no answer. Divine will, backed by divine power, worked out the sovereign purpose of love, and here we are, saved from so great a death by love invincible.

Yes, indeed, to God the Lord belong the issues from death. Come, then, brethren and sisters, *let him have all the glory of it.* If you are alive after a long sickness, bless the Lord, who forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases. If you are saved from condemnation

this morning, and know it, bless the Lord, who accepts us in the beloved. If you feel at this moment that the death of sin has no dominion over you, for the life of grace reigns within, then bless the Lord who has quickened you into newness of life. Glorify his name this day, who in love to your soul has delivered you from the pit of corruption, and cast all your sins behind his back. Once more, if you have a glorious hope of a blessed resurrection, and feel that you can smile on death because God smiles on you, then bless the Lord who will raise you up at the last day. Your Redeemer liveth, and you shall live because he lives, therefore clap your hands with holy glee. Bless the all-glorious name of him to whom belong the issues from death.

II. Thus have I set forth the prerogative; and now, secondly, follow me with your thoughts while I show THE CHARACTER OF THE SOVEREIGN in whom that prerogative is vested. We cannot upon this earth exhibit much love to human princes who claim absolute dominion. Imperialism is not to our mind. Among the worst curses that have ever fallen upon mankind have been absolute monarchs: nowadays men shake them off as Paul shook off the viper into the fire. The Lord grant we may see the last of all despotic dynasties, that the nations may be free. We cannot endure a tyrant, and yet if we could have absolutely perfect despots it might be the best possible form of government. Assuredly, the great and eternal God, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, is absolutely perfect; and we may be well content to leave all prerogatives and vest all powers in his hands. He has never trampled on the rights of the meanest, nor forgotten the weakest. His foot doth not needlessly crush a worm, nor doth he beat down a fly in wantonness. He has never done a wrong, nor wrought an injustice. *We* oppress each other, but the Judge of all oppresses none. The Lord is holy in all his ways, and his mercy endureth for ever; and the amplest prerogatives are safely lodged in such hands.

Our text yet further tells us who it is in whose hands the issues of life and death are left: "He that is our God is the God of salvation." Sinner, your salvation rests with God, but do not therefore be discouraged, for that God with whom the matter rests is the God of salvation, or of "salvations," for so the Hebrew hath it. What mean we by this?

The Scripture signifieth, first, that *salvation is the most glorious of all God's designs*. Since this world was made, the working out of salvation has run through history like a silver thread. The Lord made the world, and lit up moon and stars, and set heaven, earth, and sea in order, with his eye upon salvation in the whole arrangement. He has ruled all things by his supreme government with the same end. The great wheels of his providence have been revolving these six thousand years before the eyes of men, and among them, and at their back, a hand has been ever passing to conduct every movement to the ultimate issue, which is the salvation of the covenanted ones. This is the object which is dearest to Jehovah's heart. He loves best to save. God was pleased with creation, but not as he is with redemption. When he made the heavens and the earth it was every-day work to him, and he merely spake and said, "It is good"; but when he gave his Son to die to redeem his people, and his elect were being saved, he did not speak with the prosaic brevity of creation, but he sang. Is it not written, "He shall rest in his love, he

shall rejoice over thee with singing"? Redemption is a matter which Jehovah sings about. Are you able to imagine what it must be for God to sing? For Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to burst forth into a joyous hymn over the work of salvation! This is because salvation is dearest to God's heart, and in it his whole nature is most intensely engaged. Judgment is his strange work, but he delighteth in mercy. He has put forth many attributes in the accomplishment of other works, but in this he has laid out all his being. He is seen in this as mighty to save. Herein he hath bared his arm. For this he has taken his Son out of his bosom. For this he has caused his Only-begotten to be bruised and put to grief. Salvation is the eternal purpose of the inmost heart of God, and by it his highest glory is revealed. This, then, is the God to whom belong the issues from death: the God whose grandest design is salvation. Sing unto his name and exult that the Lord reigneth, even the Lord who is my strength and my song, who also hath become my salvation.

Ask ye yet again what this meaneth—"He that is our God is the God of salvation," and we remind you that *the most delightful works which the Lord has performed have been works of salvation*. To save our first parents at Eden's gate, and give them a promise of victory over the serpent, was joy to God. To house Noah in the ark was also his pleasure. The drowning of a guilty world was needful, but the saving of Noah was pleasant to the Lord our God. He destroyed the earth with his left hand, but with his right hand he shut in the only righteous ones he found. To save his people is ever his joy: he goes about it eagerly. He rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind when he came to deliver his chosen. What noise he makes about his saving work at the Red Sea! The whole Scripture is full of allusions to the great salvation out of Egyptian bondage, and even in heaven they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. The Old Testament seems to ring with the note, "Sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." The Lord did greatly rejoice to make a way through the wilderness, and a path through the deeps for his own people, that he might work salvation for them in the midst of the earth. Afterwards in the Old Testament how well they keep the records of salvations! They tell us of the kings that oppressed the people, but how lovingly they linger over the way in which God redeemed Israel from her adversaries. What a note of joy there is about Goliath slain, and the son of Jesse bearing his gory head, and Israel delivered from Philistia's vaunts! Well did they say, "He that is our God is the God of salvation." He takes delight in deeds of grace: these are his enjoyments. These are his recreations. He comes out in his royal robes and puts on his crown jewels when he rises to save his people, and therefore his servants cry aloud, "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard; which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." This then is the God in whom is vested all sovereignty over the issues from death. He takes pleasure, not in the destruction, but in the salvation of the sons of men. Where could the prerogative be better laid up?

"He that is our God is the God of salvation," also means that at this

present time the God who is preached to us is the God of salvation. *We live at this moment under the dispensation of mercy.* The sword is sheathed, the scales of justice are put by. Those scales are not destroyed, and that sword is not broken, nor even blunted, but for a while it slumbereth in its scabbard. To-day over all our heads is held out the silver sceptre of eternal love. The angelic carol, first heard by shepherds at Bethlehem, lingers still in the upper air, if you have ears to hear it,—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” The mediatorial reign of Christ is that of multiplied salvations. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” is the saving proclamation of the reigning God. The God of the Christian age is the God of salvation. He is set forth before us as coming to seek and to save the lost. He dwells among us by his abiding Spirit, not as a Judge punishing criminals, but as a Father receiving his wandering children to his bosom, and rejoicing over them as once dead but now alive again. God in Christ Jesus, our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, is he, who quickeneth whom he will, and is ordained to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. Where else could all power be more safely laid up?

Once more : “He that is our God is the God of salvation” means this, that to his covenanted ones, *to those who can call him “our God” he is specially and emphatically the God of salvation.* There is no destruction for those who call him “our God,” for “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Jesus came not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. “This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be”—our destroyer?—no, “he will be our guide even unto death.” This God is our sun and shield, and he will give grace and glory. Now, mark well this fact: we who believingly call the Lord our God this morning will tell you that we are saved entirely through the sovereign grace of God, and not through any natural betterness of our own, nor through anything that we have done to deserve his favour. It was because he looked upon us with pity and kindly regard when we were dead in sin that therefore we live. When we were lying in our blood, and in our filthiness, he passed by in the time of love, and he said to us, “Live.” If he had passed by, and left us to die, he would have been infinitely just in so doing, but his heart was otherwise inclined. He looked on us and said “Live,” and we lived, and we bless his name that we are living still, and praising his eternal and infinite mercy. He who saith “I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal,” is he who has quickened us, though we were dead in trespasses and sins. Surely, he who has exercised his prerogative so kindly towards us may be trusted to exercise it towards all who come to him according to his gracious invitation. If there be any man who saith, “I rejoice in the election of God, because, although he hath saved me, he hath left others to perish,” I desire to have no sympathy with his spirit. My joy is of a far different kind, for I argue that he who saved such an unworthy one as I am will cast out none that come to him by faith. His election is not narrow, for it comprehends a number that no man can number, yea, all that will believe in Jesus. He waiteth to be gracious, and him that cometh to him he will in no wise cast out. The wedding feast needs countless guests,

and every seat must be filled. We wish that all the human race would come and accept the provisions of infinite love, and we are anxious to go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. We rejoice to know that if any man be shut out from Christ and hope he shuts himself out, though at the same time we feel that if any man be shut in he did not shut himself in, but undeserved grace wrought out his salvation. Justice rules in condemnation, but grace reigns in salvation. In salvation we must ascribe all to grace, absolutely and unreservedly. There must be no stammering over this truth. Some begin to say grace, but they do not out with the word: they stutter it into "free-will." This will never do. This is not according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, nor is it in accordance with fact. If there is any man here who thinks that he has been saved as the result of his own will, apart from the powerful grace of God, let him throw his cap up, and magnify himself for ever. "Glory be to my own good disposition!" But as for me, I will fall at the foot of the throne of God, and say, "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ. Hadst thou, O God, left me to my own free will, I had continued still to despise thy love, and to reject thy mercy." Surely, all the people of God agree that this is the fact in their own case, however they may differ theoretically from the general statement.

Yes, the prerogative of life and death is in good hands, it is in the hands of him who is the God of our salvation, and I beseech every one here present who is not saved to be encouraged to bow before the throne of the great King, and sue for mercy of him who is so ready to save. Go home and try to merit salvation, and you will waste your efforts. Go about to fit yourself for mercy, and to fashion some good that may attract the regard of God, and you will befool yourselves, and insult the majesty of heaven: but come just as you are, all guilty, empty, meritless, and fall before the great King, whom you have so often provoked, and beseech him of his infinite mercy to blot out your transgressions, to change your natures, and to make you his own, and see if he will cast you away. Is it not written, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared"? And again, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." His throne is a throne of grace. Mercy is built up for ever before him. He is the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Did ever a penitent sue for pardon at his sovereign feet to be rejected? Never; nor shall such a case happen while the earth remaineth. If you try to purchase his favour you shall be refused; if you claim it as a right you shall be rejected; but if you will come and accept salvation of the divine charity, and receive it through the atonement of Christ Jesus, the Lord will find for you an escape from death. Hear the witness of Jeremiah, and be encouraged to cast yourself before the Lord:—"I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life."

III. Our last duty is to hear THE SOLEMN WARNING OF OUR SOVEREIGN LORD. A new god has been lately set up among men, the god of modern Christianity, the god of modern thought, a god made of

honey or sugar of lead. He is all leniency, gentleness, mildness, and indifference in the matter of sin. Justice is not in him, and as for the punishment of sin, he knows it not. The Old Testament, as you are, no doubt, made aware by the wise men of this world, takes a very harsh view of God, and therefore modern wisdom sets it on one side. Forsooth, one half the word of God is out of date, and turned to waste paper. Although our Lord Jesus did not come "to destroy the law or the prophets," but to fulfil them, yet the advanced thinkers of these enlightened times tell us that the idea of God in the Old Testament is a false one. We are to believe in a new god, who does not care whether we do right or wrong, for by his arrangement all will come to the same end in the long run. There may be a little twisting about for awhile for some who are rather incorrigible, but it will all come right at last. Live as you like, go and swear and drink, go and oppress the nations, and make bloody wars, and act as you will; by jingo you will be all right at last. This is roughly the modern creed which poisons all our literature. But let me say, by Jehovah this shall not be as men dream. Jehovah, the Judge of all the earth, must do right. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: the God of the whole earth shall he be called. He hath not changed one whit in the stern integrity of his nature, and he will by no means spare the guilty. Read, then, the last verse of our text, and believe that it is as true to-day as when it was first written, and that if Jesus himself were here, the meek and lowly one would say it in tones of tearful solemnity, but he would utter it none the less. "God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

It is clear from these words that God is not indifferent to human character. Our God knows his enemies, he does not mistake them for friends, nor treat them as such. He regards iniquity as a trespass, and therefore he has not broken down the bounds of law, nor the hedges of right: there are trespasses still, and God perceives them, and notes them down, and such as go on in their trespasses are trying his long-suffering and provoking his justice. God sleeps not, neither does he wink at human sin, but calls upon all men everywhere to repent.

And it is clear too that God has the power to smite those who rebel against him. Dream not of natural laws which will screen the wicked—"He shall wound the head of his enemies." They may lift up those heads as high as they please, but they cannot be beyond the reach of his hand. He will not merely bruise their heels, or wound them on the back with blows which may be healed, but at their heads he will aim fatal blows, and lay them in the dust. He can do it, and he will. They may be very strong, and their scalp covered with hair may indicate unabated strength, but they cannot resist omnipotence. There may be no sign as yet of the baldness which comes of weakness, or of the scantiness of hair which is a token of old age, but vain are they who boast their vigour, for in their prime he can cause them to wither as the grass of the field. The proud may vaunt themselves of their beauty: their hairy scalp, like that of Absalom, may be their boast, but as the Lord made the hair of Absalom to be the instrument of his doom, so can he make the glory of man to be his ruin. Pride

goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. No man is out of the reach of God, and no nation either. The great ones stand on high upon their lofty places, and they talk about the "vulgar crowd," and despise the godly of the land. As for foreign races, how lightly are they esteemed, though one God has made them all. Populations and nations, what are they? Mere food for powder when a proud nation is set upon its own aggrandizement. Overturn their kingdoms, slaughter their patriotic defenders, redden the earth with blood, burn their houses, starve their women and children. Doth God know, and is there judgment in the Most High? We are a great people, and have the men, the ships, and the money. Who shall call us to account? Yet let the still small voice be heard. Thus said the Lord to a great nation of old, "Thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know." From such chastisements good Lord deliver us.

When the Lord does put his hand to the work of vengeance his smiting will be terrible, even an utter overthrow, for it will be a smiting upon the head. If he doth not smite his enemies until the hour of death, what a blow will they then receive! They boasted of their self-righteousness, or of their greatness; but, oh, what terror will seize them when at the last moment, while they dream of heaven they are smitten down into the unfathomable deep, where woe shall be the everlasting reward of their daring rebellion against their King! Warriors of old times would when they went to battle often shave off all their hair, except those locks which are on the hinder part of the scalp; yet when they turned to flee it frequently happened they were grasped by their pursuers by their flowing hair. God does not often take the wicked by the forelock, for he has great patience, and bears with them. In special cases, as when young men through dissipated habits hasten on their doom, he takes them in front; but as a rule he waits in mercy, and yet he suffers them not to go unpunished, for at the last he seizes their hairy scalp. If for fourscore years infinite patience should permit a man to continue in his rebellion, yet if he goeth on in his trespasses at the very last God shall thrust his hand into his hairy scalp and grasp him to his destruction.

Turn ye, then, ye that know not God, turn ye at his rebuke this morning, for the rebuke is meant in love; and if I have used hard words it is because my heart is honestly anxious that you would repent and escape to him who hath in his power the issues from death. I am not like yon flatterers who tell you that there is a little hell and a little God, from which you naturally infer that you may live as you like. Both you and they will perish everlastingly if you believe them. There is a dreadful hell, for there is a righteous God. Turn ye to him, I entreat you, while yet in Christ Jesus he sets mercy before you. He is the God of salvation, and entreats you to come and accept of his great grace in Christ Jesus.

The Lord bless this word according to his own mind, and unto him be praise for ever and ever. Amen.