

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE UNCONQUERABLE KING.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1870, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“At the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”—Daniel iv. 34, 35.

No one has ever numbered Nebuchadnezzar with the prophets, or believed his language to be inspired. We have before us simply a statement made by an uninspired man, after passing through the most extraordinary experience. He had been among the greatest and proudest of men: he suddenly fell into the condition of a grass-eating ox, by losing his reason; and upon being restored, he acknowledged publicly the hand of the Most High. I should not have taken his language as my text if it had not happened to be, as it is, a most correct and vigorous statement of sublime doctrines which are clearly stated by the Holy Spirit in different parts of Scripture. It is a singular instance of how, when God comes to deal with men in afflicting providences, he can make them clearly see many great truths concerning himself, and can constrain them to express their convictions in identically the same way as they would have done if his own Spirit had dictated the terms. There are certain parts of the divine character which even the unspiritual man cannot avoid seeing; and after passing through certain processes of suffering and humiliation, the man is compelled to add his witness to the testimony of God's Spirit with regard to the divine character. Every single word that Nebuchadnezzar here utters can be backed up and supported by undoubtedly inspired words of men sent of God to proclaim infallible truth. We shall not therefore need to answer the objection that our text is simply the statement of Nebuchadnezzar—we grant that it is so—but we shall show as we proceed that Babylon's humbled monarch herein has spoken most correctly and accurately, and in full accordance with the testimony of other parts of Scripture.

Before I conduct your minds to a close consideration of the text, I must make one remark. Many of you will very naturally suppose that the chapter read during this service, the hymns and the sermon, were all intended to have reference to a certain great political event reported

in the papers of last night;\* but please to observe that your supposition will be unfounded, for my text was fixed upon yesterday morning, before any sort of news had reached me, and the service would have been the same if that event had not occurred. So that anything strikingly suggestive in the choice of the passage may be looked upon, if you will, as denoting the guidance of God's Spirit, but must not be imputed to any intentional reference on my part.

We will now come first to *consider the doctrinal instruction of the text*; secondly, we would learn *the practical teaching of it*; and thirdly, we would exhibit *the spirit suitable after the contemplation of such a subject*.

I. First, then, let us turn to the text, and consider THE DOCTRINAL INSTRUCTION here given to us.

We have here plainly stated the doctrine of *the eternal self-existence of God*. "I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever." If this word needed to be confirmed we would refer you to the language of John in the Book of the Revelation, where we find him describing, in the fourth chapter, at the ninth and tenth verses, the living creatures and the four and twenty elders as giving glory and honour and thanks, "to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and for ever." Better still, let us hear the witness of our own Redeemer, in the fifth of John's gospel, at the twenty-sixth verse, where he declares that "the Father hath life in himself." My brethren, you need not that I marshal in array a host of confirmative passages, for the eternal self-existence of God is taught throughout the Scriptures, and is implied in that name which belongs only to the true God, Jehovah, "I Am that I Am," where note, that it is not "I was," which would imply that in some measure or respect he had ceased to be, nor is it "I will be," which would intimate that he is not now what he will be, but I AM, the only being, the root of existence, the immutable, and eternal One. "We," as a venerable Puritan observes, "have more of nothing than of being," but it is God's prerogative to be. He alone can say, "I am God, and beside me there is none else." He declares, "I lift up my hand to heaven, and say I live for ever." He is the one only underived, self-existent, self-sustained Being. Let us know of a surety that the Lord God whom we worship is the only Being who necessarily and from his own nature exists. No other being could have been but for his sovereign will, nor could it continue were that will suspended. He is the only light of life, all others are reflections of his beams. There must be God, but there was no such necessity that there should be any other intelligences. In all the future God must be, but the necessity for the continuance of other spirits lies in his will and not in the very nature of things. There was a time when the creatures were not; they came from him as vessels from the potter's wheel; they all depend upon him for continuance, as the streamlet on the fountain whence it flows; and if it were his will they all would melt away as the foam upon the water. That immortality of spirits implied in such passages as Matthew xxv. 46, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal," is the result of his own resolve to make spirits whose duration should be eternal; and

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\* The surrender of Napoleon to the King of Prussia.

though he will never withdraw the endowment of immortality which he has bestowed, yet the reason for eternal existence is not in the beings, but entirely in himself, for essentially "he only hath immortality:"—

"He can create and he destroy."

All that is, whether material or intellectual, if so it had pleased God to ordain, might have been as transient as a sunbeam, and have vanished as speedily as the rainbow from the cloud. If anything now existeth of necessity, that necessity sprang from God, and still dependeth upon the necessity of divine decree.

God is independent—the only being who is so. We must find food with which to repair the daily wastes of the body; we are dependent upon light and heat, and innumerable external agencies, and above all and primarily dependent upon the outgoings of the divine power towards us. But the I AM is self-sufficient and all-sufficient.

"He sits on no precarious throne,  
Nor borrows leave to be."

He was as glorious before he made the world as he is now; he was as great, as blessed, as divine in all his attributes before sun and moon and stars leaped into existence as he is now; and if he should blot all out as a man erases the writing of his pen, or as a potter breaks the vessel he has made, he would be none the less the supreme and ever-blessed God. Nothing of God's being is derived from another, but all that exists is derived from him. Ye hills and mountains, ye seas and stars, ye men and angels, ye heavens and ye heaven of heavens, ye minister nothing to him who made you, but ye all stand up together in existence flowing from your Creator.

God ever liveth in this respect, that he undergoes no sort of change; all his creatures must from their constitution undergo more or less of mutation. Of them all it is decreed, "They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." Our life is made up of changes. From childhood we hasten to youth, from youth we leap to manhood, from manhood we fade into old age; our changes are as many as our days. "The creature" is indeed in our case "made subject to vanity." Lighter than a feather, more frail than the flower of the field, brittle as glass, fleeting as a meteor, tossed to and fro like a ball, and quenched as a spark—"Lord, what is man?" There cometh to us all in the time appointed the great and ultimate change in the which the spirit is separated from the body, to be followed by another in which the divided manhood shall be re-united; but with God there are no changes of this or any other kind. Hath he not declared, "I am God, I change not"? God is essentially and evermore pure Spirit, and consequently undergoes no variableness nor shadow of a turning. Of none of the creatures can this be said. Immutability is an attribute of God only. The things created were once new, they are waxing old, they will become older still; but the Lord hath no time, he dwelleth in eternity. There is no moment of beginning with the Eternal, no starting-point from which to calculate age. From of old he was the Ancient of Days, "from everlasting to everlasting thou art

God." Let your mind retreat as far as its capacities will allow into the remote past of old eternity, and there it finds Jehovah alone in the fulness of his glory. Then let the same thought flash forward into the far-off future, as far as unreined imagination can bear it, and there it beholdeth the Eternal, unchanged, unchangeable. He works changes and effects changes, but he himself abides the same. Brethren, let us worship him with words like these—

"Thy throne eternal ages stood,  
Ere seas or stars were made;  
Thou art the Ever-living God,  
Were all the nations dead.

Eternity with all its years,  
Stands present in thy view;  
To thee there's nothing old appears;  
Great God! there's nothing new.

Our lives through various scenes are drawn,  
And vex'd with trifling cares,  
While thine eternal thought moves on  
Thine undisturb'd affairs."

That he lives for ever is the result, not only of his essential and necessary self-existence, of his independence, and of his unchangeableness, but of the fact that there is no conceivable force that can ever wound, injure, or destroy him. If we were profane enough to imagine the Lord to be vulnerable, yet where is the bow and where the arrow that could reach him on his throne? What javelin shall pierce Jehovah's buckler? Let all the nations of the earth rise and rage against God, how shall they reach his throne? they cannot even shake his footstool. If all the angels of heaven should rebel against the Great King, and their squadrons should advance in serried ranks to besiege the palace of the Most High, he has but to will it, and they would wither as autumn leaves, or consume as the fat upon the altar. Reserved in chains of darkness, the opponents of his power would for ever become mementos of his wrath. None can touch him; he is the God that ever liveth. Let us who delight in the living God bow down before him, and humbly worship him, as the God in whom we live and move, and have our being.

In our text we next find Nebuchadnezzar asserting *the everlasting dominion of God*. He saith, "Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation." The God whom we serve not only exists, but reigns. No other position would become him but that of unlimited sovereignty over all his creatures. "The most high God, possessor of heaven and earth hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all." As David said so also say we, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all." "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." The Lord is naturally the ruler of all, but who shall pretend to rule over him? He is not to be judged of man's finite reason, for he doeth great things which we cannot comprehend. Amazing is the impertinence of man, when the creature dares to sit in

judgment on the Creator. His character is not to be impugned or called in question ; only the boundless arrogance of our pride would so dare to insult the thrice holy God. "Be still, and know that I am God," is a sufficient reply to such madness. The Lord's place is on the throne, and our place is to obey ; it is his to govern, ours to serve ; his to do as he wills, and ours, without questioning, to make that will our constant delight. Remember, then, that in the universe God is actually reigning. Never let us conceive of God as being infinitely great, but not exerting his greatness, infinitely able to reign, but as yet a mere spectator of events. It is not so. The Lord reigneth even now. Though in one sense we pray, "Thy kingdom come," yet in another we say, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever." The throne of the universe is not vacant, nor its power in abeyance. God doth not hold a bare title to kingship, but he is actually King. The government is upon his shoulders, the reins of management are in his hands. Even at this hour he speaks to the sons of men, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me : I kill, and I make alive ; I wound, and I heal : neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Before your very eyes he has fulfilled his word. (Luke i. 51, 52.) Events appear to fly at random like the dust in the whirlwind, but it is not so. The rule of the Omnipotent extends over all things at all times. Nothing is left to its own chance hap, but in wisdom all things are governed. Glory be unto the omnipresent and invisible Lord of all.

This divine kingdom appeared very plainly to the once proud monarch of Babylon, to be an everlasting one. The reign of the Everliving extends as other kingdoms cannot, "from generation to generation." The mightiest king inherits power and soon yields his sceptre to his successor ; the Lord hath no beginning of days nor end of years ; predecessor or successor are words inapplicable to him. Other monarchies stand while their power is unsubdued, but in an evil hour a greater power may crush them down. There is no greater power than God ; yea, there is no other power but that which proceeds from God, for "God hath spoken once ; twice have I heard this ; that power belongeth unto God ;" hence his monarchy cannot be subdued, and must be everlasting. Dynasties have passed away, dying out for lack of heirs, but God the everliving asks none to succeed him and to perpetuate his name. Internal corruptions have often blasted empires which stood aloft like forest trees, defiant of the storm : at the core the tree was rotten, and ere long, weakened by decay, it tottered to its fall ; but the infinitely holy God has no injustice, error, partiality, or evil motive in the government of his affairs, everything is arranged with spotless holiness, unimpeachable justice, unvarying fidelity, untarnished truth, amazing mercy, and overflowing love. All the elements of his kingdom are most conservative, because radically right. There is no evil leaven in the council chamber of Omniscience, no corruption on the judgment-seat of heaven ; hence "his throne is established in righteousness." (Psalm xlvii. 8.) Because his throne is holy we rejoice that it can never be moved.

Pause here, dear hearer, and let your soul's eye behold again this view of things. God has reigned from the first day, God shall reign when days

are gone. Everywhere he is the reigning God—reigning when Pharaoh said, “Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him?” as much as when Miriam took her timbrel, and said, “Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously;” reigning when Scribe and Pharisee, Jew and Roman, nailed his only-begotten Son to the cross, as much as when the angelic cohorts shouted in triumph, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in;” reigning amid all the calamities which sweep the globe as much as he shall be in the halcyon days of peace. Never is the throne vacant, never is the sceptre laid aside. Jehovah is always King, and shall be King for ever and for ever. Oh, happy subjects, who have such a throne to look to! Oh, blessed children, who have such a King to be your Father! You, as a royal priesthood, may feel your royalties and your priesthods both secure, for this unconquerable King sitteth securely on his throne. Your monarch has not yielded up his sword to a superior foe, you have not to search for another leader. In the person of his dear Son he walks among our golden candlesticks, and holds our stars in his right hand. He keepeth Israel, and never slumbers nor sleeps.

But we must hasten on. Nebuchadnezzar, humbled before God, uses, in the third place, extraordinary language with regard to *the nothingness of mankind*. “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing.” This is Nebuchadnezzar, but his words are confirmed by Isaiah, “Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket,” the unnoticed drop which remains in the bucket after it has been emptied into the trough, or the drip which falls from it as it is uplifted from the well, a thing too inconsiderable to be worthy of notice. “And are counted as the small dust of the balance;” as the dust which falls upon scales, but is not sufficient to affect the balance in any degree whatever. “Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.” Whole archipelagos he uplifts as unconsidered trifles. This triple kingdom of ours he reckons not only to be little, but “a very little thing.” The vast island of Australia, the gems of the Pacific, the nations of the Southern Ocean, all these he handles as children lift their toys. “All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” So if Nebuchadnezzar goes far, Isaiah, inspired of the Spirit, goes farther; the one calls the nations “nothing,” and the other “less than nothing and vanity.” You will find the passage in the fortieth of Isaiah, at the fifteenth and seventeenth verses. Now mark the force of each word, “*all* the inhabitants of the earth,” not some of them only, not the poor ones among them, but the rich, the kings, the wise, the philosophers, the priests, all put together, “are as nothing.” What an assembly would there be if all the nations could be gathered together! An impressive spectacle rises before my vision! One had need possess an eagle’s wing merely to pass over the mighty congregation. Where could a plain be found which could contain them all? Yet all of them, saith the text, are “as nothing.”

Now, observe they are so in themselves, for concerning all of us who are gathered here it is certain that there was a time when we were not—we were then in very deed “nothing.” At this very moment, also, if God wills it, we may cease to be, and so in a step return to nothing. We are nothing in ourselves, we are

only what he chooses to allow us to be, and when the time comes—and it will be a very short time, so far as this world is concerned—we shall be nothing. All that will remain of us among the sons of men will be some little hillock in a cemetery or a country churchyard, for we shall have no part in anything which is done under the sun. Of what account at this day, my brethren, are all the antediluvian millions? What are the hosts of Nimrod, of Shishak, of Sennacherib, of Cyrus? What recks the world of the myriads who followed the march of Nebuchadnezzar, who obeyed the beck of Cyrus, who passed away before the eye of Xerxes? Where are the generations which owned the sovereignty of Alexander, or the legions which followed and almost adored the eagles of the Cæsars? Alas! even our grandsires, where are they? Our sons forewarn us that we must die. Have they not been born to bury us? So pass the generations like the successive series of forest leaves; and what are they but at their best estate “altogether vanity”?

The nations are nothing in comparison with God. As you may place as many ciphers as you like together, and they all make nothing, so you may add up as many men, with all their supposed force and wisdom, as you please, and they are all nothing in comparison with God. He is the unit. He stands for all in all, and comprehendeth all; and all the rest are but so many valueless ciphers till his unity makes them of account. Here let me remind you that every man who is spiritually taught of God is made to feel experimentally on his own account his own utter nothingness. When his inner eye, like that of Job, beholdeth the Lord, he abhors himself, he shrinks into the earth, he feels he cannot contrast or compare himself with the Most High even for a single second.

“Great God, how infinite art thou!  
What worthless worms are we!”

is the verse which naturally leaps to the lip of any man who knows himself and knows his God. Spiritually, our nothingness is very conspicuous. We were nothing in our election: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you;” “The children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;” “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” We were nothing in our redemption; we contributed nothing to that price which Jesus paid: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me.” We are nothing in our regeneration: can the spiritually dead help the blessed God to quicken them? “It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.” “We are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus.” We shall, when we get to heaven, make it part of our adoration to confess that we are less than nothing and vanity, but that God is all in all; therefore shall we cast our crowns at his feet, and give him all the praise for ever and ever.

“The inhabitants of the earth are as nothing:” It is a wonderful expression, and you see I do not attempt to expound it or any part of the text; I rather repeat words of the same meaning with the text by way of illustration. Before me is a great deep, and who shall fathom it? I would not darken counsel by words without knowledge.

If there were an ant's nest somewhere in a farmer's estate, suppose he had ten thousand acres of land, that ant's nest would bear some proportion, though a very small one, to the ten thousand acres of land; it could not be so strictly said to be as nothing as the whole world can when compared with God. This round earth bears a very insignificant proportion to the vast creation of God, even to that which is revealed to us by the telescope; and we have reason to believe that all which can be seen with the telescope—if indeed it be a mass of worlds, and all inhabited—is but as a pin's prick compared with the city of London, to the far-reaching universe. If it be so, and your mind were capable of compassing the entire creation of God, yet it would be only as a drop of a bucket compared with God himself who made it all, and could make ten thousand times ten thousand as much, and then be but at the beginning of his power. This world then bears no such proportion to the Lord as an ant's nest to the estate of ten thousand acres. Now if the farmer wishes to till the soil, it is not at all probable that he will take any cognisance whatever of that ant's nest in the arrangement of his affairs, and in all probability will overturn and destroy it. This proves the insignificance of the emmet, and the greatness of man as compared with ants; but as it involves a degree of forgetfulness or overlooking on the farmer's part, the ants are great enough to be forgotten, but the nations are not great enough even for that. If it were possible for the farmer to arrange without difficulty all his plans, so that without disturbing his proceedings, every bird, emmet, and worm should be cared for in his scheme, how great then would he be compared with the ants! And this is just the case with the Lord: he so arranges all things, that apparently without effort the government of providence embraces all interests, wrongs none, but yields justice to all. Men are so little in the way of God that he never finds it needful to perpetrate an injustice even on a single man, and he has never caused one solitary creature to suffer one unnecessary pang. Herein is his greatness, that it comprehends all littlenesses without a strain: the glory of his wisdom is as astonishing as the majesty of his power, and the splendours of his love and of his grace are as amazing as the terror of his sovereignty. He may do what he wills, for none can stay him; but he never wills to do in any case aught that is unjust, unholy, unmerciful, or in any way inconsistent with the perfection of his matchless character. Here let us pause, and worship. I at least must do so; for my soul's eyes ache, as though I had been gazing at the sun.

We turn now to the next sentence, which reveals *the divine power at work sovereignly*. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." This is easy to understand in reference to the celestial host, for we know that God's will is done in heaven: we devoutly pray that it may yet be done on earth after the same fashion. The angels find it their heaven to be obedient to the God of heaven. Under the term "army of heaven" is comprehended fallen angels who were once numbered with that band, but were expelled from heaven for their rebellion. Devils unwillingly, but yet of necessity, fulfil the will of God. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." When we read in the text that on earth God's will is done, we

see that it is so in a measure among the righteous whose renewed hearts seek after God's glory; but the truth goes further, for that will is also accomplished in the unrighteous, and by those who know him not; yea, in those whose will is determined to oppose him; still in some way unknown to us the will of God is still achieved. (Prov. xix. 21; Acts iv. 27, 28.) I can understand a man taking so many pieces of wood, and arranging them just as he pleases, nor can I see any very remarkable skill in so doing; but the miracle of divine glory lies in this—that he has made men free agents, has endowed them with a will, with which will he never interferes, except according to the laws of mind; that he leaves them absolutely free to do what they will, and they will universally of themselves to do contrary to his will; and yet, such is the magnificent strategy of heaven, such is the marvellous force of the divine mind, that despite everything, the will of God is done. Some have supposed that when we believe with David, in Psalm cxv., that God hath done whatsoever he hath pleased, we deny free agency, and of necessity moral responsibility also. Nay, but we declare that those who would do so are tinctured with the old captious spirit of him who said, "Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" and our only answer is that of Paul, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Can you understand it, for I cannot, how man is a free agent, a responsible agent, so that his sin is his own wilful sin and lies with him and never with God, and yet at the same time God's purposes are fulfilled, and his will is done even by demons and corrupt men?—I cannot comprehend it: without hesitation I believe it, and rejoice so to do, I never hope to comprehend it. I worship a God I never expect to comprehend. If I could grasp him in the hollow of mine hand, I could not call him my God; and if I could understand his dealings so that I could read them as a child reads his spelling book, I could not worship him; but because he is so infinitely great I find truth here, truth there, truth multiform; and if I cannot compress it into one system, I know it is all clear to him, and I am content that he should know what I know not. It is mine to-day to adore and obey: by-and-by when he sees fit I shall know more and adore better. It is my firm belief that everything in heaven, and earth, and hell, will be seen to be, in the long run, parts of the divine plan; yet never is God the author or the accomplice of sin, never is he otherwise than the hater of sin and the avenger of unrighteousness. Sin rests with man, wholly with man, and yet by some strange overruling force, Godlike and mysterious, like the existence of God, his supreme will is accomplished. Observe how the two truths combine in practice, and are stated in the same verse in reference to our Lord's crucifixion, in Acts ii. 23: "Him, being delivered by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Now, to deny this truth because we cannot understand it, were to shut ourselves out of a great deal of important knowledge. Brethren, if God does not rule everywhere, then something rules where he does not, and so he is not omnipresently supreme. If God does not have his will, some one else does, and so far that some one is a rival to God. I never deny the free agency of man, or diminish his responsibility, but I dare never invest the free will of man with omnipotence, for this were to make man into a sort of

God, an idolatry to be loathed. Moreover, admit chance anywhere, and you have admitted chance everywhere, for all events are related and act on one another. One cog of the wheel of providence disarranged or left to Satan, or man's absolute freedom apart from God, would spoil the whole machinery. I dare not believe even sin itself to be exempted from the control of providence, or from the overruling dominion of the Judge of all the earth. Without providence we were unhappy beings, without the universality of the divine power providence would be imperfect, and in some points we might be left unprotected and exposed to those evils which are, by this theory, supposed to be beyond divine control. Happy are we that it is true, "the Lord doeth as he wills in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."

Let us now consider the fifth part of the text—"None can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" I gather from this *that God's fiat is irresistible and unimpeachable*. We are told by some annotators that the original has in it an allusion to a blow given to a child's hand to make him cease from some forbidden action. None can treat the Lord in that manner. None can hinder him, or cause him to pause. He has might to do what he wills. So also says Isaiah: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?" Man is powerless, then, to resist the fiat of God. Usually he does not know God's design, although he blunderingly thinks he does: often in opposing that apparent design, he fulfils the secret design of God against his will. If man did know God's design, and should set himself with all his might against it, yet as the chaff cannot resist the wind, as it is not possible for the wax to resist the fire, so neither can man effectually resist the absolute will and sovereign good pleasure of the Most High. Only, here is our comfort; it is right that God should have this might, because he always uses his might with strictest rectitude. God cannot will to do anything unjust, ungenerous, unkind, ungodlike. No laws bind him as they bind us, but he is a law to himself. There is "Thou shalt," and "Thou shalt not," for me, for you, but who shall put "Thou shalt" to God, or who shall say, "Thou shalt not"? Who shall attempt to be legislator for the King of kings? God is love. God is holiness. God is the law. God is love, and doing as he wills, he wills to love. God is holy, and doing as he wills, he wills holiness, he wills justice, he wills truth; and though there were raised a thousand questions as to how is this just? how is that loving? how is that wise? the one sufficient answer is—

"God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain."

O sons of men, it is not for me to unriddle the enigmas of the Infinite, he shall explain himself. I am not so impertinent as to be his apologist, he shall clear himself. I am not called to vindicate his character. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? What folly to hold up a candle to show the brightness of the sun! How much more foolish to attempt to defend the thrice holy Jehovah! Let him speak for himself if he will deign to contend with you. If you do but hear his thunders, how you tremble! when his lightnings set the heavens on fire, how

amazed ye are! Stand ye forth, then, and question him if you dare. If you are at sea in a storm, when every timber of your vessel creaks, when the mast is broken, when the mariners stagger like drunken men, when overhead is the horrible tempest, and the thundering voice of God in the tempest, and all around you the howling winds, then ye cease your cavillings, and cry unto him in your trouble. Act ye then this day as you would do in such a case, for ye are equally in his hands. (Psalm xcix. 1, 5; c. 3, 4.)

Thus have I tried to set forth the doctrine of the text.

II. Now, very briefly, consider its PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION.

I think the first lesson is, *how wise to be at one with him!* As I bowed before the majesty of this text in my study, I felt within my soul, "Oh, how I long to be perfectly at one with this infinitely mighty, glorious and holy God. How can I dare to be his enemy?" I felt then if I had not yielded before I must yield now, subdued before him. I would that any of you who are not doing his will would give up your hopeless rebellion. He invites you to come. He might have commanded you to depart. In his infinite sovereignty he has appointed Christ Jesus to be the Saviour of men. Come and accept that Saviour by faith.

*How encouraging this is to those who are at one with God!* If he be on our side, who shall be against us? "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." We ought to be of the same mind as that believing woman who, during an earthquake, was observed to be very happy. Everybody else was afraid—houses were falling, towers were rocking, but she smiled; and when they asked her why, she replied, "I am so glad to find that my God can shake the world; I believed he could, and now I see that he can." Be glad that you have one to trust in to whom nothing is impossible, who can and will achieve his purposes. My heart feels that she would give him the power if he had it not, and if it were all mine. I would leave all power in his hands even if I could remove it. "Great God, reign thou supremely, for there is none like unto thee." "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof."

How joyful this thought ought to be *to all holy workers!* You and I have enlisted on the side of God and of his Christ, and, though the powers against us seem very strong, yet the invincible King will surely put them to the rout ere long. Romanism, idolatry, infidelity, these all appear mighty things; and so seem those pots fresh from the potter—a child thinks them to be stone; but when the Lord Jesus smites them with the rod of iron, see how the potsherds fly! This shall he do ere long. He will lift the might of his terrible arm and bring down his iron rod, then shall it be seen that the truth as it is in Jesus must and shall prevail.

How this should *help you that suffer!* If God does it all, and nothing happens apart from God, even the wickedness and cruelty of man being still overruled by him, you readily may submit. How graciously and with what good face can you kiss the hand which smites you! The husband is gone to heaven, God took him; the property has melted, God has permitted it. You were robbed, you say; well, think not so much of the second cause, look to the great first cause. You strike a dog, he bites the stick; if he were wise, he would look at you who use it. Do not look at the second cause of the afflictions, look to the great

first cause; it is your God who is in it all, your Father God, the infinitely good. Which would you desire to have done on earth, your will or God's will? If you are wise, you say, "Not my will, but thine be done." Then accept the ways of providence. Since God appoints them, accept them with grateful praise. Herein is true sacrifice to God when we can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." We have received good at his hands, and we have blessed him—heathen men and publicans might have done that; but if we receive evil and still bless him, this is grace, this is the work of his Holy Spirit. If we can bow before his crushing strokes, and feel that if the crushing of us by the weight of his hand will bring him honour, we are content; this is true faith. Give us grace enough, O Lord, never to fail in our loyalty, but to be thy faithful servants even to sufferings' bitterest end. Oh, to have the mind thus subjected to God! Some kick at the doctrine of divine sovereignty, but I fear it is because they have a rebellious, unhumbled spirit. Those who feel obedient to God cannot have God cried up too much, cannot yield him too absolute an authority. Only a rebellious child in a house wishes the father to be tied by rules and regulations. No, my Father must do right, let him do what he wills.

III. What is THE RIGHT SPIRIT in which to contemplate all this?

The first is *humble adoration*. We do not worship enough, my brethren. Even in our public gatherings we do not have enough worship. O worship the King! Bow your heads now—bow your spirits rather, and adore him that liveth for ever and ever. Your thoughts, your emotions, these are better than bullocks and he-goats to be offered on the altar: God will accept them. Worship him with lowliest reverence, for you are nothing, and he is all in all.

Next let the spirit of your hearts be that of *unquestioning acquiescence*. He wills it! I will do it or I will bear it. God help you to live in perfect resignation.

Next to that, exercise the spirit of reverent love. Do I tremble before this God? Then I must seek more grace that I may love him as he is; not love him when my thoughts have diminished him of his splendour, and robbed him of his glory, but love him even as an absolute sovereign, for I see that sovereignty exercised through Jesus Christ, my shield and his Anointed. Let me love my God and King, and be a courtier, happy to be admitted near his throne, to behold the light of the Infinite Majesty.

Lastly, let our spirit be that of *profound delight*. I believe there is no doctrine to the advanced Christian which contains such a deep sea of delight as this. The Lord reigns! The Lord is King for ever and ever! Why, then all is well. When you get away from God, you get away from peace. When the soul dives into him, and feels that all is in him, then she feels a calm delight, a peace like a river, a joy unspeakable. Strive after that delight this morning, my beloved, and then go and express it in your songs of praise. If you are alone this afternoon, any of you, and not engaged in service, be sure to bless and magnify your God. Lift up your hearts in his praise, for "whoso offereth praise glorifieth God."

May the Lord bring us all, through faith in Jesus Christ, into harmony with this ever-blessed and ever-living God, and unto him be praise and glory for ever and for ever. Amen.