

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GREAT BIRTHDAY AND OUR COMING OF AGE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 21ST, 1884, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."—Galatians iv. 3—6.

THE birth of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world is a wellspring of pure, unmingled joy. We associate with his crucifixion much of sorrowful regret, but we derive from his birth at Bethlehem nothing but delight. The angelic song was a fit accompaniment to the joyful event, and the filling of the whole earth with peace and good will is a suitable consequence of the condescending fact. The stars of Bethlehem cast no baleful light: we may sing with undivided joy, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." When the Eternal God stooped from heaven and assumed the nature of his own creature who had rebelled against him, the deed could mean no harm to man. God in our nature is not God against us but God with us. We may take up the young child in our arms and feel that we have seen the Lord's salvation; it cannot mean destruction to men. I do not wonder that the men of the world celebrate the supposed anniversary of the great birthday as a high festival with carols and banquets. Knowing nothing of the spiritual meaning of the mystery, they yet perceive that it means man's good, and so in their own rough way they respond to it. We who observe no days which are not appointed of the Lord, rejoice continually in our Prince of Peace, and find in our Lord's manhood a fountain of consolation.

To those who are truly the people of God the incarnation is the subject of a thoughtful joy, which ever increases with our knowledge of its meaning, even as rivers are enlarged by many trickling brooks. The Birth of Jesus not only brings us hope, but the certainty of good things. We do not merely speak of Christ's coming into relation with our nature, but of his entering into union with ourselves, for he has become one flesh with us for purposes as great as his love. He is one with all of us who have believed in his name.

Let us consider by the light of our text the special effect produced upon the church of God by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in

human flesh. You know, beloved, that his coming a second time will produce a wonderful change upon the church. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun." We are looking forward to his second advent for the uplifting of the church to a higher platform than that upon which it now stands. Then shall the militant become triumphant, and the labouring become exultant. Now is the time of battle, but the second advent shall bring both victory and rest. To-day our King commands us to conflict, but soon he shall reign upon Mount Zion, with his ancients gloriously. When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Then shall the bride adorn herself with her jewels, and stand ready for her Husband. The whole waiting creation which now groaneth and travaileth together in harmony with the birth-pangs of the church shall then come to her time of deliverance, and enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is the promise of the second advent; but what was the result of the first advent? Did that make any difference in the dispensation of the church of God? Beyond all doubt it did. Paul here tells us that we were minors, in bondage under the elements of the world, until the fulness of time was come, when "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." Some will say, "He is speaking here of the Jews"; but he expressly guards us in the previous chapter against dividing the church into Jews and Gentiles. To him it is only one church, and when he says we were in bondage he is talking to the Galatian Christians, who were many of them Gentiles; but in truth he regards them neither as Jews nor Gentiles, but as part of the one and indivisible church of God. In those ages in which election mainly embraced the tribes of Israel there were always some chosen ones beyond that visible line, and in the mind of God the chosen people were always regarded as neither Jews nor Gentiles, but as one in Christ Jesus. So Paul lets us know that the church up to the time of the coming of Christ was like a child at school under tutors and governors; or like a young man not yet arrived at years of discretion, and therefore most fitly kept under restraint. When Jesus came his great birthday was the day of the coming of age of the church: then believers remained no more children, but became men in Christ Jesus. Our Lord by his first advent brought the church up out of her nonage and her pupilage into a condition of maturity, in which it was able to take possession of the inheritance, and claim and enjoy its rights and liberties. It was a wonderful step from being under the law as a schoolmaster, to come from under its rod and rule into the freedom and power of a full-grown heir; but such was the change for believers of the old time, and in consequence there was a wonderful difference between the highest under the Old Testament and the lowest under the New. Of them that are born of woman there was not born a greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. John the Baptist may be compared to a youth of nineteen, still an infant in law, still under his guardian, still unable to touch his estate; but the least believer in Jesus has passed his minority, and is "no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

May the Holy Spirit bless the text to us while we use it thus. First, let us *consider in itself the joyful mission of the Son of God*, and then let

us consider *the joyful result which has come of that mission*, as it is expressed in our text.

I. I invite you to CONSIDER THE JOYFUL MISSION OF THE SON OF GOD. The Lord of heaven has come to earth; God has taken upon himself human nature. Hallelujah!

This great transaction was accomplished at the right time: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman." The reservoir of time had to be filled by the inflowing of age after age, and when it was full to the brim the Son of God appeared. Why the world should have remained in darkness for four thousand years, why it should have taken that length of time for the church to attain her full age, we cannot tell; but this we are told, that Jesus was sent forth when the fulness of time was come. Our Lord did not come before his time nor behind his time: he was punctual to his hour, and cried to the moment,—*"Lo, I come."* We may not curiously pry into the reasons why Christ came when he did; but we may reverently muse thereon. The birth of Jesus is the grandest light of history, the sun in the heavens of all time. It is the pole-star of human destiny, the hinge of chronology, the meeting-place of the waters of the past and the future. Why happened it just at that moment? Assuredly it was so predicted. There were prophecies many which pointed exactly to that hour. I will not detain you just now with them; but those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures well know that, as with so many fingers, they pointed to the time when the Shiloh should come, and the great sacrifice should be offered. He came at the hour which God had determined. The infinite Lord appoints the date of every event; all times are in his hand. There are no loose threads in the providence of God, no stitches are dropped, no events are left to chance. The great clock of the universe keeps good time, and the whole machinery of providence moves with unerring punctuality. It was to be expected that the greatest of all events should be most accurately and wisely timed, and so it was. God willed it to be when and where it was, and that will is to us the ultimate reason.

If we might suggest any reasons which can be appreciated by ourselves, we should view the date in reference to the church itself as to the time of her coming of age. There is a measure of reason in appointing the age of twenty-one as the period of a man's majority, for he is then mature, and full grown. It would be unwise to make a person to be of age while only ten, eleven, or twelve; everybody would see that such boyish years would be unsuitable. On the other hand, if we were detained from being of age till we were thirty, every one would see that it was a needless and arbitrary postponement. Now, if we were wise enough, we should see that the church of God could not have endured gospel light earlier than the day of Christ's coming; neither would it have been well to keep her in gloom beyond that time. There was a fitness about the date which we cannot fully understand, because we have not the means of forming so decided an estimate of the life of a church as of the life of a man. God alone knows the times and seasons for a church, and no doubt to him the four thousand years of the old dispensation made up a fit period for the church to abide at school, and bear the yoke in her youth.

The time of coming of age of a man has been settled by law with reference to those that are round about him. It were not meet for servants that the child of five or six should be master: it were not meet in the world of commerce that an ordinary boy of ten or twelve should be a trader on his own account. There is a fitness with reference to relatives, neighbours, and dependants. So was there a fitness in the time when the church should come to her age with regard to the rest of mankind. The world must know its darkness that it might value the light when it should shine forth; the world must grow weary of its bondage that it might welcome the great Emancipator. It was God's plan that the world's wisdom should prove itself to be folly; he meant to permit intellect and skill to play themselves out, and then he would send his Son. He would allow man to prove his strength to be perfect weakness, and then he would become his righteousness and strength. Then, when one monarch governed all lands, and when the temple of war was shut after ages of bloodshed, the Lord whom the faithful sought suddenly appeared. Our Lord and Saviour came when time was full, and like a harvest ready for his reaping, and so will he come again when once more the age is ripe and ready for his presence.

Observe, concerning the first advent, that *the Lord was moving in it towards man*. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." We moved not towards the Lord, but the Lord towards us. I do not find that the world in repentance sought after its Maker. No; but the offended God himself in infinite compassion broke the silence, and came forth to bless his enemies. See how spontaneous is the grace of God. All good things begin with him.

It is very delightful that God should take an interest in every stage of the growth of his people from their spiritual infancy to their spiritual manhood. As Abraham made a great feast when Isaac was weaned, so doth the Lord make a feast at the coming of age of his people. While they were as minors under the law of ceremonial observances, he led them about and instructed them. He knew that the yoke of the law was for their good, and he comforted them in the bearing of it; but he was glad when the hour came for their fuller joy. Oh, how truly did the Psalmist say, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" Tell it out with joy and gladness, that the blessings of the new dispensation under which we dwell are the spontaneous gifts of God, thoughtfully bestowed in great love, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. When the fulness of time was come, God himself interposed to give his people their privileges; for it is not his will that any one of his people should miss a single point of blessedness. If we are babes it is not his wish; he would have us men. If we are famished it is not by his desire, he would fill us with the bread of heaven.

Mark the divine interposition,—"God sent forth his Son." I hope it may not seem wearisome to you if I dwell upon that word "sent,"—"God *sent* forth his Son." I take great pleasure in that expression, for it seals the whole work of Jesus. Everything that Christ did was done by commission and authority of his Father. The great Lord, when he was born at Bethlehem, and assumed our nature, did it under divine authorization; and when he came and scattered gifts with both

his hands among the sons of men he was the messenger and ambassador of God. He was the Plenipotentiary of the Court of Heaven. At the back of every word of Christ there is the warrant of the Eternal; at the back of every promise of Christ there is the oath of God. The Son doeth nothing of himself, but the Father worketh with him and in him. O soul, when thou dost lean on Christ thou dost rely upon no amateur Saviour, no uncommissioned Redeemer; but upon One who is sent of the Most High, and therefore is authorised in everything that he does. The Father saith, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him:" for in hearing him you are hearing the Most High. Let us find joy, then, in the coming of our Lord to Bethlehem, because he was sent.

Now run your eye to the next word: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth *his Son*." *Observe the Divine person who was sent.* God sent not an angel, nor any exalted creature, but "his Son." How there can be a Son of God we know not. The eternal filiation of the Son must for ever remain one of those mysteries into which we must not pry. It were something like the sin of the men of Beth-shemesh if we were to open the ark of God to gaze upon the deep things of God. It is quite certain that Christ is God; for here he is called "his Son." He existed before he was born into this world; for God "sent" his Son. He was already in being or he could not have been "sent." And while he is one with the Father, yet he must be distinct from the Father, and have a personality separate from that of the Father, otherwise it could not be said that God sent his Son. God the Father was not made of a woman, nor made under the law, but only God the Son; therefore, while we know and are assured that Christ is one with the Father, yet is his distinctness of personality most clearly to be observed.

Admire that God should have only one begotten Son, and should have sent him to uplift us. The messenger to man must be none other than God's own Son. What dignity is here! It is the Lord of angels that is born of Mary; it is he without whom was not anything made, who deigns to hang at a woman's breast and to be wrapped in swaddling bands. Oh, the dignity of this, and consequently, oh, the efficiency of it! He that has come to save us is no weak creature like ourselves; he that has taken upon himself our nature is no being of limited strength, such as an angel or a seraph might have been; but he is the Son of the Highest. Glory be to his blessed name! Let us dwell on this with delight.

"If some prophet had been sent
With salvation's joyful news,
Who that heard the blest event
Could their warmest love refuse?

But 'twas he to whom in heaven
Hallelujahs never cease;
He, the mighty God, was given—
Given to us—a Prince of Peace.

None but he who did create us
Could redeem from sin and hell;
None but he could reinstate us
In the rank from which we fell."

Press on, still keeping to the very words of the text, for they are very

sweet. *God sent his Son in real humanity*—"made of a woman." The Revised Version properly hath it, "born of a woman." Perhaps you may get nearer to it if you say, "Made to be born of a woman," for both ideas are present, the *factum* and the *natum*, the being made and the being born. Christ was really and truly of the substance of his mother, as certainly as any other infant that is born into the world is so. God did not create the human nature of Christ apart, and then transmit it into mortal existence by some special means; but his Son was made and born of a woman. He is, therefore, of our race, a man like ourselves, and not man of another stock. You are to make no mistake about it; he is not only of humanity, but of your humanity; for that which is born of a woman is brother to us, be it born when it may. Yet there is an omission, I doubt not intentional, to show how holy was that human nature, for he is born of a woman, not of a man. The Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin, and "that holy thing" was born of her without the original sin which pertains to our race by natural descent. Here is a pure humanity though a true humanity; a true humanity though free from sin. Born of a woman, he was of few days and full of trouble; born of a woman, he was compassed with our physical infirmities; but as he was not born of man he was altogether without tendency to evil or delight therein. I beg you to rejoice in this near approach of Christ to us. Ring out the glad bells, if not in the spires and steeples, yet within your own hearts; for gladder news did never greet your ear than this, that he that is the Son of God was also "made of a woman."

Still further it is added, that God sent his Son "*made under the law*," or born under the law; for the word is the same in both cases; and by the same means by which he came to be of a woman he came under the law. And now admire and wonder! The Son of God has come under the law. He was the Law-maker and the Law-giver, and he is both the Judge of the law and the Executioner of the law, and yet he himself came under the law. No sooner was he born of a woman than he came under the law: this voluntarily and yet necessarily. He willed to be a man, and being a man he accepted the position, and stood in the place of man as subject to the law of the race. When they took him and circumcised him according to the law, it was publicly declared that he was under the law. During the rest of his life you will observe how reverently he observed the commands of God. Even to the ceremonial law as it was given by Moses he had scrupulous regard. He despised the traditions and superstitions of men, but for the rule of the dispensation he had a high respect.

By way of rendering service unto God on our behalf, he came under the moral law. He kept his Father's commandments. He obeyed to the full both the first and the second tables; for he loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. "I delight to do thy will, O my God," saith he, "yea, thy law is within my heart." He could truly say of the Father, "I do always those things that please him." Yet it was a marvellous thing that the King of kings should be under the law; and especially that he should come under the penalty of the law as well as the service of it. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." As our Surety and Substitute he came under the curse of the law;

being made a curse for us. Having taken our place and espoused our nature, though without sin himself, he came under the rigorous demands of justice, and in due time he bowed his head to the sentence of death. "He laid down his life for us." He died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. In this mystery of his incarnation, in this wonderful substitution of himself in the place of sinful men, lies the ground of that wonderful advance which believers made when Jesus came in the flesh. His advent in human form commenced the era of spiritual maturity and freedom.

II. I ask you now, therefore, in the second place, to CONTEMPLATE THE JOYOUS RESULT WHICH HAS COME OF OUR LORD'S INCARNATION.

I must return to what I have said before—*this coming of Christ has ended the minority of believers*. The people of God among the Jews were before Christ came the children of God; but they were mere babes or little children. They were instructed in the elements of divine knowledge by types, emblems, shadows, symbols: when Jesus was come there was an end of that infantile teaching. The shadows disappear when the substance is revealed; the symbols are not wanted when the person symbolized is himself present. What a difference between the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ when he shows them plainly of the Father and the teaching of the priests when they taught by scarlet wool and hyssop and blood! How different the teaching of the Holy Ghost by the apostles of our Lord, and the instruction by meats and drinks and holy days. The old economy is dim with smoke, concealed with curtains, guarded from too familiar an approach; but now we come boldly to the throne, and all with unveiled face behold as in a glass the glory of God. The Christ has come, and now the Kindergarten school is quitted for the college of the Spirit, by whom we are taught of the Lord to know even as we are known. The hard governorship of the law is over. Among the Greeks, boys and youths were thought to need a cruel discipline: while they went to school they were treated very roughly by their pedagogues and tutors. It was supposed that a boy could only imbibe instruction through his skin, and that the tree of knowledge was originally a birch; and therefore there was no sparing the rod, and no mitigation of self-denials and hardships. This fitly pictures the work of the law upon those early believers. Peter speaks of it as a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (Acts xv. 10). The law was given amid thunder and flaming fire; and it was more fitted to inspire a wholesome dread than a loving confidence. Those sweeter truths, which are our daily consolation, were hardly known, or but seldom spoken. Prophets did speak of Christ, but they were more frequently employed in pouring out lamentations and denunciations against children that were corrupters. Methinks, one day with Christ was worth a half century with Moses. When Jesus came, believers began to hear of the Father and his love, of his abounding grace, and the kingdom which he had prepared for them. Then the doctrines of eternal love, and redeeming grace, and covenant faithfulness were unveiled; and they heard of the tenderness of the Elder Brother, the grace of the great Father, and the indwelling of the ever-blessed Spirit. It was as if they had risen from servitude to freedom, from infancy to manhood. Blessed were

they who in their day shared the privilege of the old economy, for it was wonderful light as compared with heathen darkness; yet, for all that, compared with the noontide that Christ brought, it was mere candle-light. The ceremonial law held a man in stern bondage: you must not eat this, and you must not go there, and you must not wear this, and you must not gather that. Everywhere you were under restraint, and walked between hedges of thorn. The Israelite was reminded of sin at every turn, and warned of his perpetual tendency to fall into one transgression or another. It was quite right that it should be so, for it is good for a man that, while he is yet a youth, he should bear the yoke, and learn obedience; yet it must have been irksome. When Jesus came what a joyful difference was made. It seemed like a dream of joy, too glad to be true. Peter could not at first believe in it, and needed a vision to make him sure that it was even so. When he saw that great sheet let down, full of all manner of living creatures and four-footed things, and was bidden to kill and eat, he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." He was startled indeed when the Lord said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." That first order of things "stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation;" but Paul saith, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." Prohibition upon mere ceremonial points, and commands upon carnal matters are now abolished, and great is our liberty: we shall be foolish indeed if we suffer ourselves to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Our minority was ended when the Lord, who had aforetime spoken to us by his prophets, at last sent his Son to lead us up to the highest form of spiritual manhood.

Christ came, we are told next, *to redeem those who were under the law*; that is to say, the birth of Jesus, and his coming under the law, and his fulfilling the law, have set all believers free from it as a yoke of bondage. None of us wish to be free from the law as a rule of life; we delight in the commands of God, which are holy, and just, and good. We wish that we could keep every precept of the law, without a single omission or transgression. Our earnest desire is for perfect holiness; but we do not look in that direction for our justification before God. If we be asked to-day, are we hoping to be saved by ceremonies? we answer, "God forbid." Some seem to fancy that baptism and the Lord's Supper have taken the place of circumcision and the Passover, and that while Jews were saved by one form of ceremonial we are to be saved by another. Let us never give place to this idea; no, not for an hour. God's people are saved, not by outward rites, nor forms, nor priestcraft, but because "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," and he has so kept the law that by faith his righteousness covers all believers, and we are not condemned by the law. As to the moral law, which is the standard of equity for all time, it is no way of salvation for us. Once we were under it, and strove to keep it in order to earn the divine favour; but we have now no such motive. The word was, "This do and thou shalt live," and we therefore strove like slaves to escape the lash, and earn our wage; but it is so no longer. Then we strove to do the Lord's will that he might love us, and that we

might be rewarded for what we did ; but we have no design of purchasing that favour now, since we freely and securely enjoy it on a very different ground. God loves us out of pure grace, and he has freely forgiven us our iniquities, and this out of gratuitous goodness. We are already saved, and that not by works of righteousness which we have done, or by holy acts which we hope to perform, but wholly of free grace. If it be of grace it is no more of works, and that it is all of grace from first to last is our joy and glory. The righteousness that covers us was wrought out by him that was born of a woman, and the merit by which we enter heaven is the merit, not of our own hands or hearts, but of him that loved us, and gave himself for us. Thus are we redeemed from the law by our Lord's being made under the law ; and we become sons and no more servants, because the great Son of God became a servant in our stead.

"What!" saith one ; "then do you not seek to do good works?" Indeed we do. We talked of them before, but we actually perform them now. Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law, but under grace. By God's grace we desire to abound in works of holiness, and the more we can serve our God the happier we are. But this is not to save ourselves, for we are already saved. O sons of Hagar, ye cannot understand the freedom of the true heir, the child born according to promise! Ye that are in bondage, and feel the force of legal motives, ye cannot understand how we should serve our Father who is in heaven with all our heart and all our soul, not for what we get by it, but because he has loved us, and saved us, irrespective of our works. Yet it is even so ; we would abound in holiness to his honour, and praise, and glory, because the love of Christ constraineth us. What a privilege it is to cease from the spirit of bondage by being redeemed from the law! Let us praise our Redeemer with all our hearts.

We are redeemed from the law in its operation upon our mind : it breeds no fear within us now. I have heard children of God say sometimes, "Well, but don't you think if we fall into sin we shall cease to be in God's love, and so shall perish?" This is to cast a slur upon the unchangeable love of God. I see that you make a mistake, and think a child is a servant. Now, if you have a servant, and he misbehaves himself, you say, "I give you notice to quit. There is your wage ; you must find another master." Can you do that to your son? Can you do that to your daughter? "I never thought of such a thing," say you. Your child is yours for life. Your boy behaved very badly to you : why did you not give him his wages and start him? You answer, that he does not serve you for wages, and that he is your son, and cannot be otherwise. Just so. Then always know the difference between a servant and a son, and the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

I know how a base heart can make mischief out of this ; but I cannot help it : the truth is the truth. Will a child rebel because he will always be a child? Far from it ; it is this which makes him feel love in return. The true child of God is kept from sin by other and better forces than a slavish fear of being turned out of doors by his Father. If you are under the covenant of works, then, mind you, if you do not fulfil all righteousness you will perish : if you are under that covenant, unless you

are perfect you are lost; one sin will destroy you, one sinful thought will ruin you. If you have not been perfect in your obedience, you must take your wages and be gone. If God deals with you according to your works, there will be nothing for you but, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." But if you are God's child, that is a different matter; you will still be his child even when he corrects you for your disobedience.

"Ah," saith one, "then I may live as I like." Listen! If you are God's child, I will tell you how you will like to live. You will desire to live in perfect obedience to your Father, and it will be your passionate longing from day to day to be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. The nature of sons which grace implants is a law unto itself: the Lord puts his fear into the hearts of the regenerate so that they do not depart from him. Being born again and introduced into the family of God, you will render to the Lord an obedience which you would not have thought of rendering to him if you had only been compelled by the idea of law and penalty. Love is a master force, and he that feels its power will hate all evil. The more salvation is seen to be all of grace, the deeper and more mighty is our love, and the more does it work towards that which is pure and holy. Do not quote Moses for motives of Christian obedience. Do not say, "The Lord will cast me away unless I do this and that." Such talk is of the bondwoman and her son; but it is very unseemly in the mouth of a true-born heir of heaven. Get it out of your mouth. If you are a son you disgrace your Father when you think that he will repudiate his own; you forget your spiritual heirship and liberty when you dread a change in Jehovah's love. It is all very well for a mere babe to talk in that ignorant fashion, and I don't wonder that many professors know no better, for many ministers are only half-evangelical; but you that have become men in Christ, and know that he has redeemed you from the law, ought not to go back to such bondage. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."

What else has he come for? Notice further, "*That we might receive the adoption of sons.*" The Lord Jesus Christ has come in human flesh that his people might to the full realise, grasp, and enjoy, "the adoption of sons." I want you this morning to see if you can do that. May the Holy Spirit enable you. What is it to receive the adoption of sons? Why to feel, Now I am under the mastery of love, as a dear child, who is both loved and loving. I go in and out of my Father's house not as a casual servant, called in by the day or the week, but as a child at home. I am not looking for hire as a servant, for I am ever with my Father, and all that he has is mine. My God is my Father, and his countenance makes me glad. I am not afraid of him, but I delight in him, for nothing can separate me from him. I feel a perfect love that casteth out fear, and I delight myself in him. Try now and enter into that spirit this morning. That is why Christ has come in the flesh—on purpose that you, his people, may be to the full the adopted children of the Lord, acting out and enjoying all the privileges which sonship secures to you.

And then, next, exercise your heirship. One who is a son, and knows he is an heir of all his father's estates, does not pine in poverty, nor act

like a beggar. He looks upon everything as his own ; he regards his father's wealth as making him rich. He does not feel that he is stealing if he takes what his father has made to be his own, but he makes free with it. I wish believers would make free with the promises and blessings of their God. Help yourselves, for no good thing will the Lord withhold from you. All things are yours : you only need to use the hand of faith. Ask what thou wilt. If you appropriate a promise it will not be pilfering : you may take it boldly and say, "This is mine." Your adoption brings with it large rights : ~~be~~ not slow to use them. "If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Among men, sons are only heirs, heirs in possession, when the father is dead ; but our Father in heaven lives, and yet we have full heirship in him. The Lord Jesus Christ was made of a woman on purpose that his dear people might at once enter into their heirship.

You ought to feel a sweet joy in the perpetual relationship which is now established between you and God, for Jesus is still your brother. You have been adopted, and God has never cancelled adoption yet. There is such a thing as regeneration, but there is not such a thing as the life then received dying out. If you are born unto God you are born unto God. The stars may turn to coals, and the sun and moon may become clots of blood, but he that is born of God has a life within him which can never end : he is God's child, and God's child he shall be. Therefore let him walk at large like a child, an heir, a prince of the blood royal, who bears a relationship to the Lord which neither time nor eternity can ever destroy. This is why Jesus was made of a woman and made under the law, that he might give us to enjoy the fulness of the privilege of adopted sons.

Follow me a minute a little further. The next thing that Christ has brought us by being made of a woman is, "*Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.*" Here are two sendings. God sent his Son, and now he sends his Spirit. Because Christ has been sent, therefore the Spirit is sent ; and now you shall know the Holy Ghost's indwelling because of Christ's incarnation. The Spirit of light, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of liberty, the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus is in you. That same Spirit which descended upon Jesus in the waters of baptism has also descended upon you. You, O child of God, have the Spirit of God as your present guide and Comforter ; and he shall be with you for ever. The life of Christ is your life, and the Spirit of Christ is your Spirit ; wherefore, this day be exceeding glad, for you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption.

There we finish, for Jesus has come *to give us the cry* as well as the spirit of adoption, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." According to ancient traditions no slave might say, "Abba, Father," and according to the truth as it is in Jesus none but a man who is really a child of God, and has received the adoption, can truly say, "Abba, Father." This day my heart desires for every one of you, my brethren, that because Christ has been born into the world you may at once come of age, and may at this hour confidently say, "Abba, Father." The great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, is my Father, and I dare avow it without fear that he will disown the kindred. The Thunderer, the ruler of the

stormy sea, is my Father, and notwithstanding the terror of his power I draw near to him in love. He who is the Destroyer, who says, "Return, ye children of men," is my Father, and I am not alarmed at the thought that he will call me to himself in due time. My God, thou who shalt call the multitudes of the slain from their graves to live, I look forward with joy to the hour when thou shalt call and I shall answer thee. Do what thou wilt with me, thou art my Father. Smile on me; I will smile back and say, "My Father." Chasten me, and as I weep I will cry, "My Father." This shall make everything work good to me, be it never so hard to bear. If thou art my Father all is well to all eternity. Bitterness is sweet, and death itself is life, since thou art my Father. Oh, trip ye merrily home, ye children of the living God, saying each one within himself, "I have it, I have it. I have that which cherubim before the throne have never gained; I have relationship with God of the nearest and the dearest kind, and my spirit for her music hath this word, 'Abba, Father; Abba, Father.'"

Now, dear children of God, if any of you are in bondage under the law, why do you remain so? Let the redeemed go free. Are you fond of wearing chains? Are you like Chinese women that delight to wear little shoes which crush their feet? Do you delight in slavery? Do you wish to be captives? You are not under the law, but under grace; will you allow your unbelief to put you under the law? You are not a slave. Why tremble like a slave? You are a child; you are a son; you are an heir; live up to your privileges. Oh, ye banished seed, be glad! You are adopted into the household of God; then be not as a stranger. I hear Ishmael laughing at you: let him laugh. Tell your Father of him, and he will soon say, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." Free grace is not to be mocked by human merit; neither are we to be made sad by the forebodings of the legal spirit. Our soul rejoices, and, like Isaac, is filled with holy laughter; for the Lord Jesus has done great things for us whereof we are glad. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians iii. 24—29;
iv.; v. 1—4.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—249, 647, 260.