

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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CHRIST—THE FALL AND RISE OF MANY.

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## A Sermon

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[I thank God most devoutly that I am permitted once again to appear in my place among you. It is always a most painful deprivation to me when I am unable to preach the gospel on the Sabbath day to my beloved congregation. I earnestly pray that this long affliction may be for my spiritual growth; and that you may all profit by that which my Lord has taught me in the school of the cross. I beseech you, my dear fellow helper, ask of God, as a great favour, that now, upon my return to my accustomed work, a double blessing may rest upon all that is done; that those already saved may be more active, and the conversions in our midst may be more numerous. So may God grant it, and his shall be the praise.]

“And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.”—Luke ii. 34.

THIS text has within it a profound deep, but I shall not attempt to fathom it. There was a company projected a few months ago for attempting to recover ingots of gold and bars of silver, supposed to be lying at the bottom of the sea in a Spanish galleon which sunk some centuries back. My barque is not fitted with the necessary machinery for obtaining gold from mysterious deeps; and I have moreover great question as to whether the attempt might not be more dangerous than profitable, for many divers into the awful depths of predestination have lost themselves, and many more have become unprofitable to the church and to the world. My barque is but a little fishing boat, whose business it is to fish for the souls of men; my gifts fit me only to be such a coasting vessel as may carry corn from port to port to feed those who hunger for satisfying bread. I shall not therefore attempt to enter into the sublime mystery which is contained in this text, as to the divine appointment of Christ to be the occasion of the falling and rising of many souls. I believe in that doctrine, however, though I cannot expound it. I tremblingly believe in Peter's words concerning those who stumble at the word, being disobedient, “whereunto also they were appointed.” But I say again, though believing the doctrine of predestination in all its length and breadth, because I see it revealed in the word of God, yet as I cannot see any practical result that might

come out of a discussion of that subject this morning, I shall leave it for other minds and tongues. Rather would I conduct you to the practical truth which lies in the text.

The great practical doctrine before us is this, that wherever Jesus Christ comes, with whomsoever he may come in contact, he is never without influence, never inoperative, but in every case a weighty result is produced. There is about the holy child Jesus a power which is always in operation. He is not set to be an unobserved, inactive, slumbering personage in the midst of Israel ; but he is set for the falling or for the rising of the many to whom he is known. Never does a man hear the gospel but he either rises or falls under that hearing. There is never a proclamation of Jesus Christ (and this is the spiritual coming forth of Christ himself) which leaves men precisely where they were ; the gospel is sure to have some effect upon those who hear it. Moreover, the text informs us that mankind, when they understand the message and work of Christ, do not regard them with indifference ; but when they hear the truth as it is in Jesus, they either take it joyfully in their arms with Simeon, or else it becomes to them a sign that shall be spoken against. He that is not with Christ is against him, and he that gathereth not with him scattereth abroad. Where Christ is no man remains a neutral ; he decides either for Christ or against him. Given a mind that understands the gospel, you have before you also a mind that either stumbles at this stumbling-stone, being scandalised thereby, or else you have a mind that rejoices in a foundation upon which it delights to build all its hopes for time and for eternity. Observe, then, the two sides of the truth—Jesus always working upon men with marked effect ; and on the other hand, man treating the Lord Jesus with warmth either of affection or opposition ; an action and a reaction being evermore produced.

Why is this, think you ? Is it not, first, because of the energy which dwells in the Lord's Christ, and in the gospel which now represents him among men ? The gospel is all life and energy, like leaven it heaves and ferments with inward energy, it cannot rest till it leavens all around it. It may be compared to salt which must permeate, penetrate, and season that which is subject to its influence. Paul compares the preaching of Christ to a sweet-smelling savour. Now, you cannot say to a perfume, "Be quiet ; do not load the air with sweets ; do not affect men's nostrils." It cannot do otherwise, the fragrance must fill the chamber. Even so, Christ must be a savour, either of life unto life, or of death unto death ; but a savour he must be wherever he comes. It is no more possible for you to restrain the working of the gospel than to forbid the action of fire. Stand before the fire, it shall warm and comfort you ; thrust your hand into it, it shall burn you. Keep that fire in its proper place, it shall yield you abundant service ; cast forth the firebrand, it shall consume your house, it shall devour all that comes in contact with it. You cannot say to fire, "Restrain your consuming energy." It must work because it is fire. And so with yonder sun. Though clouds may hide it from our sight at this moment, yet for ever does it pour forth, as from a furnace mouth, its heat and light. Nor could it cease to burn and shine, unless it ceased to be a sun. As long as it is a sun, it must permeate surrounding space, with

its influence and splendour. Do you wonder that the Sun of Righteousness is of yet diviner energy? Do you marvel that whether the blaze of his glory blinds his enemies, or his warmth of love dries the tears of his friends, in every case there is a distinct result, and a manifest effect? Never does the gospel return void, it prospers even in that for which the Lord hath sent it. Jesus in the gospel cannot cease to work. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The Father in providence pauses not, nor does the Son cease from the work of grace.

Moreover, be it remembered that Jesus Christ and his gospel are matters of such prime necessity to mankind, that from this cause also there must always be an effect produced by Christ. Consider other matters that are of first necessity to humanity, and my meaning will be clear. Here is the air, I breathe it. What then? Why, I live. I cannot breathe it without obtaining this grand result. The lungs receive the air, the blood is supplied with oxygen, life is sustained. Suppose I refuse to breathe the air, what then? Will there be any remarkable effect produced? Shall I be sickly? Shall I be a little faint? Shall I be somewhat less energetic? No, I must die. Breathing, I live, refusing to breathe, I die. So the Lord Jesus is as necessary to our souls as the atmosphere to our bodies. If we receive Christ Jesus we live; we cannot receive him without living by him. If we will not receive him, we must die. It is unavoidable that it should be so. You cannot reject the Saviour and be a little damaged thereby; there is no alternative but that you utterly perish. Take another article of human necessity, bread. You shall eat bread, it shall nourish you, it shall provide for you the material of flesh and sinew, nerve and bone. Refuse to eat it, and you put your life from you. You may, if you will, try to impose upon others, but, whether watched or unwatched, you shall die if you will not eat. So ordained is it by wise decree that there is no living without food; let but the space of time be long enough, and death must be inevitable to those who will not eat. So is it with Christ, who is the bread sent down from heaven. Receive him, you have all that your soul wants to sustain it and drive away its hunger; reject him, and there is neither in heaven nor in earth anything that can supply your soul's lack.

I might instance the water that we drink, or indeed anything else that is not a matter of luxury or of artificial want, but which is absolutely needful to human life; all such things become operative for good or ill, according as you accept them or reject them. So must it necessarily be with Christ.

We may add that the position in which Jesus Christ meets man makes it inevitable that he must have an effect upon them. I shall not speak of the heathen who hear not of him, nor of our unhappy heathen around us who will not hear of him. But concerning you who have heard of Christ, I assert that in your case the Lord Jesus has met with you on occasions where to accept or to refuse was to make a crisis in your being. He was right in your way. It was one Sunday evening when the Holy Ghost was with the preacher; or it was one day when your father had just been buried; or, woman, it was one night when your dear babe had just been taken from your bosom and laid upon the bed of death. You may readily recall the occasion. Christ came right in your way, and you

could not go round about to get from him; you must either that night stumble over him, make him to be to yourself a rock of offence, or you must then and there build on him and accept him as your soul's confidence. I believe that such a time of decision comes to all hearers of the Word who have at all intelligently heard it. And when the Holy Ghost enables us from that time forth to take the Redeemer to be the ground of our soul's confidence, oh, what a joy it is! But if we are left to ourselves to reject Christ, we shall not have rejected him without a strain upon conscience, without having done violence to everything good and true. We shall not have stumbled at Christ without knowing that we were stumbling at the noblest gift of God, at the greatest token of the Father's love, stumbling at the only thing which could deliver us from the wrath to come, and ensure us an eternity of joy. Thus, you see, because Christ comes to us at the important crisis of our life, he, therefore, cannot be indifferent to us. He must make us either to fall or rise.

Once again, let me observe that the Lord Jesus was appointed for this very thing: so saith the text, "He was *set* for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." It was for this very end he came. See the husbandman take the fan. You observe the heap of mingled wheat and chaff lying on the floor. He begins to move the fan to and fro till he has created a breeze of wind. What happens? The chaff flies to the farther end of the threshing floor, and there it lies by itself; the wheat, more weighty, remains purified and cleansed, a golden heap of grain. Such is the preaching of the gospel. Such is Christ: he is the separator of those who will perish from those who shall be saved. The fan discerns and discovers, it reveals the worthless and manifests the precious. Thus hath Christ the fan in his hand! Or, take another metaphor, which we find in the prophets, "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's sope." You see the refiner's fire. Notice how it burns and blazes. Now, it turns to a white heat; you cannot bear to look on it. What has happened? Why the dross is divided from the silver, and the alloy from the gold. The refiner's fire separates the precious from the vile. And so the gospel reveals the elect of God, and leaves to hardness of heart the finally impenitent. Where it is preached, the men who accept it are precious ones of God, his elect, his chosen; the men who reject it are the reprobate silver. So shall men call them, for God hath rejected them. Mark too, the fuller's soap. The fuller takes his soap, and exercising his craft upon yonder piece of linen marked with many stains and colours, you see how these foul things fly before the soap, and the fair fabric alone remains. Both spots and linen feel the power of the soap. So doth the gospel take the polluted fabric of humanity and cleanse it: the filth departs and flies before it, and the fair linen remains. Such are the saints of God; when the gospel comes to them they are purified thereby, while the wicked, as foul spots, are driven away in their wickedness.

Thus I have shown you that it is not possible for Christ to come anywhere without working some result. I would impress upon each of you that it is not possible for Christ to come to you without effecting a result in you. I beseech you never fall into the error of those who

assert that unbelief is no sin, and that to reject Christ is no fault of yours. The whole tenour of Holy Scripture is contradictory to that most erroneous opinion. I know of hardly anything more likely to lull the conscience to sleep than that delusion. Depend upon it the gospel will be a savour of death unto death to you, if it be not a savour of life unto life to you. If you believe not, you are condemned already. Why? Hear ye the voice of God: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation (above all other condemnations), that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." You are in a solemn position, this morning, in listening to the gospel of Christ; you cannot go out of this house without a mark having been made upon you which shall remain there evermore either for your good or for your ill. Christ must operate upon your souls. He is set either for your fall or for your rising again.

Having thus set forth the great truth of the text, I purpose with as much brevity as shall be possible, to answer one or two questions.

I. The first is this, WHO ARE THOSE THAT FALL BY CHRIST? In Christ's day the question was not difficult to answer. Those that fell by Christ, were, first of all, *the holders of tradition*. There were certain persons who always pleaded, "It was said by them of old time." They quoted some saying of Rabbi Ben this, or Rabbi Ben that; and these famous sayings were practically exalted above the written Word of God, often so as to take the very meaning out of the decalogue itself, and make the traditions of men a higher authority than the commandments of God. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ laid the axe at the root of this evil tree; for often and often did he say, "It is said by them of old time, but I say unto you." He denounced their making void the law of God through their traditions. He took a besom and relentlessly swept away the old cobwebs of what the fathers did, and what the ancients said, and placed the everlasting "it is written" above the authority of antiquity. Much such work is there for him to do in this our day, when the use of Sarum, and the custom of the orthodox churches, and I know not what else of venerable rubbish, profane the house of God; and, my brethren, he will surely do it, and tradition will yet again fall before the ever-living Word.

There fell also by our Lord's hand *the externalists*. These men made much of washing their hands before they ate bread, they thought it a great thing to make broad the borders of their garments, they were peculiarly attentive to their phylacteries, they carefully used strainers to keep flies from getting into their wine, lest unclean animals should touch their lips. But the Master in his ministry made short work of them. Ye blind fools, said he, ye strain at gnats, and ye swallow camels. How he held up to scorn their long prayers, and vain pretences, their tithing of cummin, and their devouring of widows' houses! Never could they forget the simile of the cup and platter, washed without but foul within, nor that of the whitewashed sepulchre, so fair to the eye, and yet so full of rottenness. "Woe unto you," said he, "Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." And with that word he swept away the whole

empire of externalism, and made men see the vanity of outward religiousness while the heart is unrenewed. How forcible are those words, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but joy in the Holy Ghost. O for an hour of our Lord's presence to lash the formalism of to-day; but be of good cheer, his gospel will do it yet.

The Master at the same time made to fall all *the self-righteous*. They conceived in themselves that they were righteous, and they despised others. What a fall he gave to such when he told that famous parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, who went up to the temple to pray; how that proud man, who thanked God he was not as other men, went to his house without peace; while the humble sinner, who confessed himself unworthy to lift his eyes to heaven, went to his house justified of God. Oh, it was a grand sweep the Master made of self-righteousness in the days of his flesh! Why, one would think that where Christ was the Pharisee must have half wished to pull off his phylactery, and hide the broad border of his garment. Small matter for his pride was it to stand away and profess to be better than other men, while Jesus of Nazareth tore off the mask and revealed the heart.

Jesus our Lord was also the fall of *the wiseacres* of his day. There were the lawyers; they knew every point; they could discern in a moment what should be and what should not be according to the fathers; and they had a way of reading every precept of Moses so as to make it mean just whatever you might please, according to the length of your purse. Then there were the Scribes; what diligent students had they been. They knew how many letters there were in the whole law, and which was the middle letter, and which the middle word. They knew the size and length of each book, and they had written notes, matchless for wisdom, upon every passage; and they were expert in muddling the sense of every passage and making the words mean what they were never intended to teach. Diligent students of the letter these doctors of divinity, these Scribes of Christ's day, and yet he nonplussed them with a question so simple that a child should be able to answer it—"David in your law called the Messiah Lord, how is he then his Son?" They could not reply to him; and if they had been able with all their wisdom to answer that one question, yet could he have asked them many more by which their ignorance would have been discovered. He was their fall, as he will be at this day the fall of all the boastfully wise, for "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness."

But if our Lord was thus the fall of those who were externally religious, who were self-righteous, who were merely orthodox, he was

also the fall of *the broad church* as well as of the high church. What a fall he gave the Sadducees! These were your broad churchmen. They professed to believe the law of Moses, but robbed it of its supernatural element; and yet they continued in the then established church. Of course they did. Why should not the national Sanhedrim be of the most comprehensive character? Yet these sceptics declared that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit. When our Lord came into the arena against them, their famous story of the woman with the seven husbands was snapped like a wooden sword, and the point of an irresistible weapon was set at their breasts as Jesus asked them whether the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was the God of the dead or of the living. Our great Leader's triumph over the sceptical faction was as complete as that achieved over the ritualistic band, to each he gave a crushing fall.

If it is easy, to answer the question, Who fell by Christ in his lifetime? it is not difficult to answer the enquiry, Who fall by Christ to-day? Why, very much the same sort of people as fell by him then. If any of you are trusting in the externals of religion, if you are strangers to the inner spiritual life, if you are depending upon your confirmation, your baptism, your reception of the sacrament, or anything of ceremony, assuredly Christ will be the fall of you. Hear ye his own words, "Ye must be born again." "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Though you may receive the baptism of Christ, and the supper of Christ, as often as you will, without his Spirit, you are lost. If there be any here who are confident in their own excellence, if you are hoping to enter heaven because you have never done any great harm, and have, on the whole, been very good people, amiable, and kind, and generous, Christ will be the fall of you; continuing as you are now, his gospel condemns you thoroughly. For what says that gospel? "By the works of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." Why, then, should you hope to be justified, in the teeth of what Christ by his inspired apostle has declared? Christ is the death of self-righteousness; and you will most assuredly perish, if self is your reliance.

Some will tell you that human nature is not at all so bad as it is said to be in Scripture. There are some fine points about man which only want opportunities of development. Ah! but if man were not fallen, why did he need a Saviour? If man were not hopelessly fallen, why need God have come down from heaven, to take upon himself human flesh to redeem man? You who praise up human nature, are robbing Christ of glory to crown a dying rebel; and rest assured that such robbery will be your ruin unless repented of. There be others who say, let man do his best and he will, no doubt, be accepted of God; they hope that there is enough of strength in man to enable him to

force his way to that which is desired of him. If so, why needs that bleeding sacrifice? What necessity for Calvary's groans and death-pangs? The sacrifice of Christ is the death of all hopes of self-salvation. If you could save yourself, it were monstrous that Christ should come to save you. I tell you if you hold to self-reliance, Christ's cross will be the fall of you. It will be a condemning witness against you.

Moreover, Jesus is the fall of all who rely upon priests, or who profess to be priests. When the Son of God has appeared as the Priest of fallen humanity, oh, how dare ye, ye curs and dogs who yelp at the heels of Antichrist, to claim to be what Jesus alone is? How dare ye take upon yourselves to stand at the altar when he is there? Now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen, we cannot, dare not, trust in such mere blots of darkness as you are.

All persons who are self-contented, all those who are lofty in mind, to these Christ will assuredly give a dreadful fall. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be laid low." Every look of pride will he abase, for he is set for the fall of all those, whether in Israel or among the Gentiles, who shall exalt themselves in the face of the Lord of Hosts. Judge ye, sirs, whether he will be your fall. You can readily tell. He that is down need fear no fall; but he that is on high may tremble lest the Child who was born in Bethlehem should be his fall.

II. But I must pass on. Another and a happier question suggests itself. **TO WHOM WILL THE LORD JESUS BE A RISING AGAIN?**

He will be a rising again to those who have fallen. Dost thou confess, "I have fallen"? Dost thou acknowledge, "I possess a fallen nature"? Dost thou lament thou hast fallen into sin? O my brother, he will be thy rising. He cannot uplift those who are not brought low; but if thou hast fallen, and art conscious of it this day, he is set to be the rising again of such as thou art. Again, are you conscious of being down? There cannot be a lifting to those who are up—there cannot be healing to those who are not sick. Christ came not for so preposterous a purpose as to be the Saviour of those who are safe already. Are you sick? He was set to heal such as you are. Are you down? Then the more desperate your fall, the deeper your sense of degradation, the more I will rejoice. If you call yourself the chief of sinners, I shall but be the more thankful; and if you feel yourself past all hope, I shall congratulate you as a prisoner of hope, for he came to be the rising again of such as you are. Clearly to everybody's common sense the rising is not for those who are already up, but for those who are in need of raising. They shall rise in him. Note, again, those that rise in him are those who are now willing to rise in him. He saves none while they are unwilling, but he makes men willing in the day of his power. Are you willing this day to rise in Christ? That gracious will came from God. That will is an indication that Jesus is

set to raise you up. Never did a soul cling to Christ with earnest will to rise, and find that Christ did leave it to perish. Only lay hold of the hem of his garment, and he will uplift you to his own glory. We have heard of drowning men who have clutched at others who could barely save themselves, but could not support another, and have therefore been compelled to throw off those who clung to them. But you may cling to Christ without fear; he is an almighty swimmer, and will bear to land every soul that layeth hold on him.

Trembling believer in Jesus the Redeemer, you shall rise from your poverty to sit among princes; you shall rise from the dunghill of your sins to reign with angels, you shall rise from your spiritual death to newness of life, you shall rise from the shame of your sin to the honour of perfection. You shall rise to be children of God, educated and trained for a better world; you shall rise to dwell in the many mansions of your Father's house; you shall rise to oneness with Christ, and shall enter into his joy, triumphing with him. And all this is not for those who have a high esteem of themselves, but for those who lament their own unworthiness and sinfulness. Still hath he a frown for the haughty, and a smile for the lowly. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away."

III. Another matter shall occupy us for a moment. Some of the best critics of modern times differ entirely from the older expositors, and think that the "and" here used is conjunctive and not disjunctive; that is to say, that the two words describe but one character, whereas, older commentators, and, as I believe, rightly, interpret the words of two classes of persons. However, let us include that other sense in our exposition. This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; that is to say, there are some who shall both fall and rise again in Christ; to whom Christ shall give such a fall as they never had before, and such a rise as shall be to their eternal resurrection. Let me give you a picture. You remember Jacob and the angel wrestling at night. Did you ever yourself experience what it was to wrestle with Christ? I do remember when he met me and entered into gracious conflict with my rebellious spirit. I stood erect in pride, and as good as told him that I had no need of a Saviour; but he wrestled with me, and would not let me go. I stood footsure, as I imagined, on the law, but what a fall he gave me when he revealed its spiritual nature, and proved me guilty at every point! Then, I thought I had firm footing with one foot on the law, and the other upon his grace, imagining that partly by the mercy of God, and partly by my own endeavours, I might be saved. But what a fall was there when I learned that if salvation was of works, it could not be of grace, and if it was

of grace it could not be of works; the two could not be mixed together. Then I said I would hope in the performance of the duties which the gospel inculcates; I thought I had power to do this; I would repent, and believe, and so win heaven. But what a fall I had, and how each bone seemed broken when he declared to me, "without me, ye can do nothing. No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him"! Do you remember, brother, when you lay before Christ and the gospel all broken and bruised, till there was no life in you except the life that could suffer pain, and even that you questioned, for you feared you did not suffer pain enough. You felt you were not penitent enough, nor believing enough, and that you could not make yourself anything other than you were. You were hopeless and helpless. Ah, this is how Christ saves souls. He gives them a fall first, and afterwards he makes them rise. You cannot fill the vessel till it is empty. There must be room made for mercy by the pouring out of human merit. You cannot clothe the man who is clothed already, or feed him who has no hunger. It is the hungry soul that is filled; it is the naked soul that is clothed; it is the fallen one that is lifted up. But this fall which Jesus gives us is a blessed fall. He never did throw a man down without lifting him up afterwards. "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal," these are the attributes of Jehovah Jesus. The text says, after the fall shall come the rising again. I have explained what that is; I hope you understand it. If you this day are enabled to lay hold of Jesus Christ by simply trusting him, you are already raised up through him. He who trusts Christ is forgiven, he is accepted, he is saved; and low as you may have fallen in your own esteem through the fall which truth has given you, you may rise just as high in the union that you have with Christ, for you are accepted in the Beloved; and there is, therefore, now no condemnation to you. Heaven is your sure portion, you shall be with Christ where he is.

IV. We shall conclude with a few words upon the last part of the text. The text tells us that the Lord Jesus is "A SIGN THAT SHALL BE SPOKEN AGAINST."

*What is he a sign of?* The Lord Jesus Christ is a remarkable sign, and the only sign I know of that was ever spoken against. He is a sign of *divine love*. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." There never was such a sign of God's love to man as when God gave his own Son for him. Now there have been many other signs of God's love, and men have not spoken against them. The rainbow was in some respects a sign of his love, that he would no more destroy the world with a flood. The sun is a sign of God's love to man, and so is the moon: he maketh the sun to shine by day, and the moon by night, for his mercy endureth for ever. A fruitful harvest, a flowing stream, a refreshing wind, the common mercies of life, these are all signs of

God's benevolence; nobody speaks against them; but the grandest sign of benevolence on God's part was when he spared not his own Son, yet hear ye not the babble, the noise and confusion of tongues, like the voices of many waters, as the nations cry, "This is the heir, let us kill him." "Away with him, away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live"? Oh, prodigy of human malice! God reaches the climax of benevolence, and man exhibits the climax of deadly hate. The greatest gift provokes the greatest hostility, and the loftiest sign brings forth the most virulent opposition.

Christ was a sign of *divine justice*. A bleeding Saviour, the Son of God deserted by his Father, the thunderbolts of vengeance finding a target in the person of the Wellbeloved, herein is justice revealed most fully. I hear not that other signs of vengeance have been spoken against. Men have trembled, but have not railed. Sodom and Gomorrah with bowed head confessed the justice of their doom. Egypt engulfed in the Red Sea saith nothing of it; none of her records contain a single blasphemy against Jehovah for having swept away the nation's chivalry. The judgments of God, as a rule, strikes men dumb with awe! But this, which was the greatest display of divine hatred of sin, where the Son of God was made to descend into the lowest depths as our substitute, this provokes to-day man's uttermost wrath. Know you not how many are continually railing at the cross? The Crucified is still abhorred. How matchless is the perversity of human nature, that when God displays his justice most, but blends it sweetly with his love, the sign is everywhere spoken against!

Let me close, where much more might be said by observing that Christ was the sign of *man's communion with God*, and of God's fellowship with man. None ought to have spoken against that. It ought to be man's greatest joy that there is a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven, that there is a connecting bridge between creature and Creator. But man does not want to be near his God, and hence he rails at the means provided for communion.

Christ is the sign of *the elect seed*. He is the woman's seed, the head of the covenanted people, and this is, perhaps, the main ground of opposition; for the serpent must always hate the seed of the woman. God has put an enmity between them. Jesus is the representative of the holy, the new-born, the spiritual. He is the sign of the elect of God; and hence, as soon as the carnal mind, that knoweth not God, nor loveth him, perceives Christ and his gospel, it at once stirs up the depth of its malevolence to put down Christ if it be possible. Brethren, they shall never put him down. They may speak against the gospel, but here is our joy, that Christ will raise up his people, and will certainly give the fall to his enemies. It is one of the proven facts of providence that no lie is immortal. Never be afraid that any error can long be dominant.

The ark of the Lord can never fall before Dagon; but Dagon must fall down before the Lord's ark. Have patience, have patience! The victory is as sure as it is slow. You may complain that the Ritualists gather force. Have patience! The Lord shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision. You may say that the doubters as to the truth of God's word are gathering in strength. But wait with patience, scepticism shall have its overthrow. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." The Lord God hath declared the decree, and the decree shall stand. Be you of good cheer, for all is well. Inasmuch as you have risen in him, be not dismayed, though the sign be spoken against. In patience possess your souls, for the day shall come when he will ease him of his adversaries, when the loftiest foe shall be hurled to the ground; for he shall dash them in pieces, he shall rule them with a rod of iron; he shall break them like a potter's vessel. O come ye on his side ye who would be safe. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Come, ye tremblers, cower down beneath the wings of your Saviour, who saith to-day as he did in the days of his flesh, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Refuse him not, lest he be unto you a swift flying eagle that scenteth the prey from afar, and descendeth with terrible vengeance thereon, to tear in pieces and to destroy.

The Lord grant that the child Jesus may be set for your rising again, and for a sign in which your souls shall delight, for his name's sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke ii.

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END OF VOLUME XV.