

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“THE STAR OUT OF JACOB.”

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“There shall come a star out of Jacob.”—Num. xxiv. 17.

THIS prophecy may have some reference to David; but we feel persuaded that the true design of the Holy Spirit is to set forth an emblem of our Lord Jesus Christ. All nature, above as well as around us, is laid under contribution to set forth our Lord. All the flowers of the field, and many of the beasts of the plain, and now the very orbs of heaven, are turned into metaphors and symbols by which the glory of Jesus may be manifested to us. Where God takes such pains to teach, we ought to be at pains to learn. Where he makes heaven and earth to be the pages of the book, we ought to be most ardent in our study. Oh, you who have neglected to learn of Christ, may that neglect come to an end, and may some word be spoken which shall be as the beaming of a star unto the darkness of your soul, that henceforth you may be led to know Christ, and to be found in him.

Our Lord, then, is compared to a star, and we shall have seven reasons to assign for this. He is called a star as:—

I. THE SYMBOL OF GOVERNMENT.

You will observe how evidently it is connected with a sceptre and with a conqueror. Jacob was to be blessed with a valiant leader who should become a triumphant sovereign. Very frequently in oriental literature, their great men, and especially their great deliverers, are called stars. The star has been constantly associated with monarchy, and even in our own country we still look upon the star as one of the emblems of lofty rank. Behold, then, our Lord Jesus Christ as the Star of Jacob. He is the Captain of his people, the Leader of the Lord's hosts, the King in Jeshurun, God over all, glorious and blessed for ever!

We may say of Jesus in this respect that he has an authority which *he has inherited by right*. He made all things, and by him all things consist. It is but just that he should rule over all things. As there is not a tongue that can move in heaven or earth, except by his permission, it is meet that every tongue should confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Oh, that men were just towards the Son of God! Would that their rebellious souls would give way to the force of rectitude—that they would no longer say, “Let us break his bonds asunder, and cast his cords from us!” Unconverted men, I would that you would yield to Jesus. He has a right to you. It is through his intercession that your forfeited life is still spared. It is by his divine goodness that you are where you are to-night. Through his mediatorial sovereignty it is, that you are suffered to be on praying ground and pleading terms with God. Give him his due then. Rob him not of the allegiance which he so justly claims. Give not your spirit over to that exacting tyrant who seeks to compass your destruction. Bow the knee and kiss the Son, even now, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way. Acknowledge him to be your Lord.

Our Lord as a star has an authority which he has valiantly won. Wherever Christ is king, he has had a great and a stern fight for it. Remember the dread conflict in Gethsemane, in which he says, “I have trodden the wine press alone.” When he came red with his own gore from Calvary, he had, in fact, there and then put to flight the hosts of Bozrah and of Edom, and stained his garments with the victor’s crimson. He who, then, travelled in the greatness of his strength is mighty still to save. In every human heart where Jesus reigns, he reigns through having dislodged, by the force of grace, the old tyrant who had fixed his sovereignty there. The maintenance of that sovereignty within the heart is the result of the same powerful sceptre of his love and grace. Oh, that King Jesus would put forth his power and get a throne in more hearts! Believers, do you not long to see him glorious? I know you do if you love him. You would live for this, you would die for this—that Christ might have his own, and drive the milk-white steeds of triumph through the streets of Jerusalem, all his people bowing before him and strewing his pathway with their honours. O sinners! would to God that you would yield to him. I pray that now he may gird his sword upon his thigh, and by the power of grace constrain you to bow your willing necks to his silver sceptre. Brethren and sisters, it is a mournful fact that Christ has so small a part of the world as yet in his royal power. See, the gods of the heathen stand fast upon their pedestals. The old harlot of Rome still flaunts in her scarlet. The crescent of Mahomed wanes, but still its baleful light is cast athwart the nations. Why tarries he? Perhaps his finger is on the latch; it may be that he will come ere long. Come quickly, Lord! our yearning hearts beseech thee to come! Meanwhile, it is for you and for me to be fighting, each soldier in his rank, each man standing in his place, as his master has bidden.

him, contending with heart and soul and strength for the right and for the true, for faith, for holiness, for the cross, and all that that cross indicates amongst the sons of men. Blessed Star of Jacob! Thou shinest with no borrowed rays; thou shinest with a mysterious power which none gave to thee, for it is inherently thine own.

Before we leave this point, I will only say this kingdom of Christ, *wherever it is, is most beneficent*. Wherever this star of government shines, its rays scatter blessing. Jesus is no tyrant. He rules not by oppression. The force he uses is the force of love. There was never a subject of Christ's kingdom that complained of him. Those who have served him most have longed to serve him more. Why, even his poor martyrs in the catacombs of Rome, dying of starvation, or dragged up to the Colosseum to be devoured by wild beasts, never said an ill-word of him. Certainly if it was hard to any, it seemed to be hard to them; but the more they were troubled the more they rejoiced, and there never were sweeter songs than those which came from dying lips when men were crackling on the faggot, or being dragged limb from limb at the heels of wild horses, or being sawn asunder. Just in proportion as the bodily pains became acute, the spiritual joy became intense; and while the outward man decayed, the inner man leaped up into newness of life, anticipating the joys of the first-born before the throne. He is a good master. Young people, I would that you would serve him! Oh! that you were enlisted in his service. It is now a good many years since I gave my heart to him, it is fast getting on for twenty years, but I cannot say a word against him. Nay, but I wish I had always served him; I wish I had served him before, and I do pray that he may use me to the fullest extent. If he will make but a doormat for his temple of me, I shall be but too glad. If he will let my name be cast out as evil and give my body to the dogs, I do not care so long as his truth does but prosper, and his name becomes great. But alas! there is so much self in us, pride and I know not what besides, that we who really know the Master, have reason to ask him to bring in his great artillery and blow down the castles of our natural corruption, conquer us yet again, and rule in us by main force of grace, till in every part and corner of our spirits there shall be nothing but the love of Christ and the indwelling of his gracious Spirit. By the star we understand the symbol of government. In the second place, the star is:—

II. THE IMAGE OF BRIGHTNESS.

When men wish to speak of brightness they talk of the stars. They who are righteous are as the stars, and they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. Our Lord Jesus Christ is brightness itself. The star is but a poor setting forth of his ineffable splendour. Oh! let the thought come home to you. He is the brightness of his Father's glory—unutterably bright as the Deity. He is brightness himself in his human nature, for in him there was neither spot nor wrinkle. As Mediator, exalted on

high, enjoying the reward of his pains, he is bright indeed. Observe, that our Lord as a star is a bright particular star in the matter of holiness. In him was no sin. Look, and look, and look again into his star-like character. Even the lynx-eyes of infidels have not been able to discover a mistake in him; and as for the attentive eyes of critics who have been believers, they have been made to water again and again, and then to glisten and sparkle with delight as they have seen the mingling of all the perfections in his adorable character to make up one perfection.

As a star, he shines also with the light of knowledge. Moses was, as it were, but a mist, but Christ is the prophet of light. "The law was given by Moses"—a thing of types and shadows—"but grace and truth come by Jesus Christ." If any man be taught in the things of God, he must derive his light from the Star of Bethlehem. You may go as you will to the universities, to the tomes of the learned, to the schools of the philosophers, but in spiritual things you receive no light till you look up to Jesus, and then in his light you see light, for there is transcendent brightness in him. He is the wisdom of God as well as the power of God; he is the way, the truth, and the life. Divine light has found its centre in him!

His light, too, is that of comfort. Oh! how many have emerged from the darkness of their souls and found peace by looking up to this Star of Jacob, the Lord Jesus Christ! Well did our hymn put it:—

"He is my soul's bright Morning Star,
And he my Rising Sun."

One glimpse of Christ and the midnight of your unbelief is over. But a sight of the five wounds and your sins are covered and your iniquities put away. Happy day, happy day, when first the soul beholds a crucified Redeemer, and gives herself up to him, relying upon him for eternal salvation. Shine, sweet Star—shine into some benighted heart to-night! Give thou holiness, give light, give the knowledge of God, give thou joy and peace in believing, in believing in the precious blood!

When speaking upon Christ as a star, "the Symbol of Government," I said, submit to him. Now, speaking of him as a star, the Image of Brightness, I say, look to him—look to him. It is the Gospel's precept. "Look unto me, and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth," and well do we sing:—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One."

Poor sinner, delay no longer. You are not asked to do anything, nor to be anything, nor to feel anything; but you are simply bidden to look away from self to what Christ has done, and you shall live.

"View him prostrate in the garden,
On the ground your Maker lies;
On the bloody tree behold him,
Hear him cry before he dies—
'It is finished.'
Sinner, will not this suffice?"

Look to him then and live. Thirdly, our Lord is compared to a star to bring out the fact, that:—

III. HE IS THE PATTERN OF CONSTANCY.

Ten thousand changes have been wrought since the world began, but the stars have not changed. There they remain. We dreamed at one time that they moved. Untaught imagination said that all those stars revolved around this little globe of ours. But we know better now. There they are both day and night—always the same, and we may say they have not changed since the world began, nor probably will they till, like a vesture, God shall roll up creation because it is worn out. It is very delightful to recollect that the same star which I looked at last night was viewed by Abraham, perhaps with some of the self-same thoughts. And when we have gone, and other generations shall have followed us, those that come after will look up to the self-same star. So with our Lord Jesus. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. What the prophets and apostles saw in him, we can see in him, and what he was to them, that he is to us, and shall be to generations yet unborn. Hundreds of us may be looking at the same star at the same time without knowing it. There is a meeting-place for many eyes. We may be drifted, some of us, to Australia, or to Canada, or to the United States, or we may be sailing across the great deep, but we shall see the stars there. It is true that on the other side of the world we shall see another set of stars, but the stars themselves are always still the same. As far as we in this hemisphere are concerned, we shall look upon the same star. So, wherever we may be, we look to the same Christ. One brother here has learning, but as he looks to Christ, he sees the same Christ as the poor unlettered woman in the aisles. And you, poor man, who have not, perhaps, a sixpence in the world, you have got the same Christ to trust in as the richest man in all the world. And you who think yourself so obscure that no one knows you but your God, you look to this same star, and it shines with the same beams for you, as for the Christian who leads the van in the Lord's hosts. Jesus Christ is still the same, the same to all his people, the same in all places, the same for ever and ever. Well, therefore, may he be compared to those bright stars that shine now as they did of old and change not. In the fourth place, we may trace this comparison of our Lord to a star as:—

IV. THE FOUNTAIN OF INFLUENCE.

The old astrologers used to believe very strongly in the influence of the stars upon men's minds. Without endorsing their exploded theories, we meet in Scripture with expressions like this:—"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?"—alluding, no doubt, to the fact that the Pleiades are in the ascendant in the sweet months of spring, when the warm breath and gentle showers are bringing forth the green sprout and tender blade, the foliage and the flowers of May, with all the loveliness of the season, while Orion is in the ascendant as a wintry sign, when the

bands of frost are binding up the outburst of nature. But, whether there be an influence in the stars or not, as touching this world, I know there is great influence in Christ Jesus. He is the fountain of all holy influences among the sons of men. Where this star shines upon the graves of men who are dead in sin, they begin to live. Where the beam of this star shines upon poor imprisoned spirits, their chains drop off, the captive leaps to lose his chains. When this star gleams upon a burdened Christian with its light, he begins to bud and blossom, and precious fruits are brought forth. When this star shines upon the backslider, he begins to mend his ways, and to follow, like the eastern sages, its light till he finds his Saviour once more. This star has an influence upon our nativity. It is through its benign rays that we are born again, and in our horoscope it has an influence upon our death, for it is in its light that we fall asleep, believing that we shall wake up in the image of the Lord Jesus. Oh! sweet star, shine on me always! Never let me miss thy rays; but may I always walk in the light thereof, till I be found sitting in the full noontide heat of the Sun of Righteousness for ever and ever. In the fifth place, the Lord Jesus Christ may be compared to a star:—

V. AS A SOURCE OF GUIDANCE.

There are some of the stars that are extremely useful to sailors. I scarcely know how else the great wide sea would be navigated, especially if it were not for the Polar Star. Jesus is the Polar Star to us. How the poor negro in the olden times, when the curse of slavery had not been taken away, must have blessed God for that pole star—so easy to find out. Any child with but a moment's teaching will soon know how to discover it in the midst of its fellows at night, and when the negro had once learned to distinguish the star that shone over the land of freedom, how he followed it through the great dismal swamps, or along the plains which were more dreadful still; how he could ford the streams, and climb the mountains, always cheered by the sight of that pole star. Such is Jesus Christ to the seeker. He leads to liberty; he conducts to peace. Oh! I wish you would follow him, some of you who are going about a thousand ways to find peace where you will never find it. There is never a Sunday but I try to speak, sometimes in gentler tones, and at other seasons with thundering notes, the simple truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I do try to make it plain to you that it is not your prayers and tears, your doings, your willings, your anything, that can save you, but that all your help is laid upon one that is mighty, and that you must look alone to him. Yet, sinners, you are still looking to yourselves. You rake the dung hills of your human nature to find the pearl of great price which is not there. You will look beneath the ice of your natural depravity to find the flame of comfort which is not there. You might as well seek in hell itself to find heaven as look to your own works and merits to find some ground of trust. Down with them! Down with

them, every one of them! Away with all those confidences of yours, for:—

“None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good.”

Just reverse that helm, and shift that sail, and tack about! Follow not the wrecker’s beacon on yonder shore luring you to the rocks of self-delusion, but where that pole star guides, thither let your vessel sail, and pray for the favouring gales of the blessed Spirit to guide you rightly to the port of peace. Our Lord is compared to a star, surely:—

VI. AS THE OBJECT OF WONDER.

One of the first lines which full many of you ever learned to recite was:—

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.”

But that is precisely what Galileo might have said, and exactly what the greatest astronomer that ever lived might say. You have sometimes looked through a telescope and have seen the planets, but after you have looked at them you do not know particularly about them; and those who are busy all day and all night long taking constant observations, I think, will tell you that the result is rather that of astonishment than of intelligence. Still, it is:—

“How I wonder what you are.”

So to those of us who are in Christ Jesus, he is a peerless star; but oh, brethren! we may well wonder what he is. We used to think when we were little ones that the stars were holes pricked in the skies, through which the light of heaven shone, or that they were little pieces of gold-dust that God had strewn about. We do not think so now; we understand that they are much greater than they look to be. So, when we were carnal, and did not know King Jesus, we esteemed him to be very much like anybody else, but now we begin to know him, we find out that he is much greater, infinitely greater than we thought he was. And as we grow in grace, we find him to be more glorious still. A little star to our view at first, he has grown in our estimation into a sun now, a blazing sun, by whose beams our soul is refreshed. Ah! but when we get near to him, what will be he? Imagine yourself borne up on an angel’s wing to take a journey to a star. Travelling at an inconceivable rate, you open your eyes on a sudden and say, “How wonderful! Why, that which was a star just now has become as large to my vision as the sun at noon-day.” “Stop,” says the angel, “you shall see greater things than these,” and, as you speed on, the disc of that orb increases, till it is equal to a hundred suns; and now you say, “But what? Am I not near it now?” “No,” says the angel, “that enormous globe is still far, far away,” and when you come to it, you would find it to be such a wondrous world, that arithmetic could not

compute its size; scarcely could imagination belt it with the zone of fancy. Now, such is Jesus Christ. I said he grows upon his people here, but what must it be to see him there, where the veil is lifted, and we behold him face to face? Sometimes we long to find out what that star is, to know him, to comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; but, meanwhile, we are compelled to sit down and sing:—

“God only knows the love of God:
Oh that it now were shed abroad
In this poor stony heart.”

We have to confess that:—

“The first-born sons of light
Desire in vain its depth to see;
They cannot reach the mystery,
The length, the breadth, the height.”

But, to conclude, the metaphor used in the text may well bear this seventh signification. Our Lord is compared to a star as:—

VII. HE IS THE HERALD OF GLORY.

The bright and morning star foretells that the sun is on its way to gladden the earth with its light. Wherever Jesus comes, he is a great prophet of good. Let him come into a heart, and, as soon as he appears, you may rest assured that there is a life of eternity and joy to come. Let Jesus Christ come into a family, and what changes he makes there. Let him be preached with power in any town or city, and what a herald of good things he is there. To the whole world Christ has proclaimed glad tidings. His coming has been fraught with benedictions to the sons of men. Yea, the coming of Christ in the flesh is the great prophecy of the glory to be revealed in the latter days, when all nations shall bow before him, and the age of peace, the golden age, shall come, not because civilisation has advanced, not because education has increased, or the world grown better, but because Christ has come. This is the first, the fairest of the stars, the prognostic of the dawn.

Ay, and because Christ has come, there will be a heaven for the sons of men who believe in him. Sons of toil, because Christ has come, there shall be rest for the weary. Daughters of sorrow, because Christ has come, there shall be healing for the weak. O you whom chill penury is bowing down! there shall be lifting up and sacred wealth for you, because the star has shone. Hope on! hope ever! Now that Jesus has come, there is no room for despair.

I commend these thoughts to you, and earnestly ask you once again, if you have never looked to Christ, to trust in him now; if you have never submitted to Jesus, to submit to him now; if you have never confided in him, to confide in him now. It is a very simple matter. May God the Holy Spirit teach and guide you to disown yourselves, and to acknowledge him; cease from your own thoughts, and trust his word. This done by you all, there is proof

positive that all is done for you by Christ. You are his, and he is yours; where he is, shall your portion be; and you shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is. It will be a day to be had in remembrance if you are led now to give yourselves to him. I well recollect when my heart yielded to his Divine grace; when I could no longer look anywhere else, and was compelled to look to him. Oh, come ye to him! I know not what words to use, or what persuasions to employ. For your own sake, that you may be happy now; for eternity's sake, that you may be happy hereafter; for terror's sake, that you may escape from hell; for mercy's sake, that you may enter into heaven, look to Jesus. You may never be bidden to do so again. This bidding may be the last, the concluding measure which shall fill up the heap of your guilt, because you reject it. Oh! do not despise the exhortation. Let the prayer go up quietly now from your spirit, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Let your soul wrestle vehemently. Let your tongue utter its mighty resolve:—

“I'll to the gracious King approach,
Whose sceptre pardon gives;
Perhaps he may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For, if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.

But, if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
That were to die, delightful thought,
As sinner never died.”

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

LUKE XV. 1—24.

Versé 1. Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

They were drawing near. It was not an unusual occurrence. It was their habit to draw near to Christ. The Pharisees and Scribes stood in the outer ring. They did not come too near. These poor outcasts and offcasts, publicans and sinners, drew near. They wanted to catch every word. They could not have too much of it. They took a delight in getting near to his blessed person. They drew near to hear him.

2. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

The sinful, known to be so. This man receives them, welcomes them, admits them to an intimacy with him. What is worse, he eats with them. To teach them is bad enough, but to sit at the same table with them, making himself their company, and making them his company, this is worse and worse. And so they murmured. I am very glad that they did. We owe a great deal to the murmurings of the proud Pharisee; for our Lord graciously answered those murmurings and then he gave us some of the choicest jewels of speech that are preserved in the treasury of knowledge.