

CHARLES KINGSLEY

THE GOOD
NEWS OF GOD

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The Good News of God:

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SERMON I

THE BEATIFIC VISION

Matthew xxii. 27

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

These words often puzzle and pain really good people, because they seem to put the hardest duty first. It seems, at times, so much more easy to love one's neighbour than to love God. And strange as it may seem, that is partly true. St. John tells us so—‘He that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?’ Therefore many good people, who really do love God, are unhappy at times because they feel that they do not love him enough. They say in their hearts—‘I wish to do right, and I try to do it: but I am afraid I do not do it from love to God.’

I think that they are often too hard upon themselves. I believe that they are very often loving God with their whole hearts, when

they think that they are not doing so. But still, it is well to be afraid of oneself, and dissatisfied with oneself.

I think, too—nay, I am certain—that many good people do not love God as they ought, and as they would wish to do, because they have not been rightly taught who God is, and what He is like. They have not been taught that God is loveable; they have been taught that God feels feelings, and does deeds, which if a man felt, or did, we should call him arbitrary, proud, revengeful, cruel: and yet they are told to love him; and they do not know how to love such a being as that. Nor do I either, my friends.

Let us therefore think over to-day for ourselves why we ought to love God; and why both Bible and Catechism bid child as well as man to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, before they bid us love our neighbours. And keep this in mind all through, that the reason why we are to love God must depend upon what God's character is. For you cannot love any one because you are told to love them. You can only love them because they are loveable and worthy of your love. And that they will not be, unless they are loving themselves; as it is written, we love God because he first loved us.

Now, friends, look at this one thing first. When we see any man do a just action, or a kind action, do we not like to see it?

Do we not like the man the better for doing it? A man must be sunk very low in stupidity and ill-feeling—dead in trespasses and sins, as the Bible calls it—if he does not. Indeed, I never saw the man yet, however bad he was himself, who did not, in

his better moments, admire what was right and good; and say, 'Bad as I may be, that man is a good man, and I wish I could do as he does.'

One sees the same, but far more strongly, in little children.

From their earliest years, as far as I have ever seen, children like and admire what is good, even though they be naughty themselves; and if you tell them of any very loving, generous, or brave action, their hearts leap up in answer to it. They feel at once how beautiful goodness is.

But why?

St. John tells us. That feeling comes, he tells us, from Christ, the light who is the life of men, and lights every man who comes into the world; and that light in our hearts, which makes us see, and admire, and love what is good, is none other than Christ himself shining in our hearts, and showing to us his own likeness, and the beauty thereof.

But if we stop there; if we only admire what is good, without trying to copy it, we shall lose that light. Our corrupt and diseased nature (and corrupt and diseased it is, as we shall surely find, as soon as we begin to try to do right) will quench that heavenly spark in us more and more, till it dies out—as God forbid that it should die out in any of us. For if it did die out, we should care no more for what is good. We should see nothing beautiful, and noble, and glorious, in being just, and loving, and merciful. And then, indeed, we should see nothing worth loving in God himself:—and it were better for us that we had never

been born.

But none of us, I trust, are fallen as low as that. We all, surely, admire a good action, and love a good man. Surely we do. Then I will go on, to ask you one question more.

Did it ever strike you, that goodness is not merely *a* beautiful thing, but **THE** beautiful thing—by far the most beautiful thing in the world; and that badness is not merely *an* ugly thing, but the ugliest thing in the world?—So that nothing is to be compared for value with goodness; that riches, honour, power, pleasure, learning, the whole world and all in it, are not worth having, in comparison with being good; and the utterly best thing for a man is to be good, even though he were never to be rewarded for it: and the utterly worst thing for a man is to be bad, even though he were never to be punished for it; and, in a word, goodness is the only thing worth loving, and badness the only thing worth hating.

Did you ever feel this, my friends? Happy are those among you who have felt it; for of you the Lord says, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

Ay, happy are you who have felt it; for it is the sign, the very and true sign, that the Holy Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of goodness, is working in your hearts with power, revealing to you the exceeding beauty of holiness, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

But did it never strike you besides, that goodness was one, and everlasting? Let me explain what I mean.

Did you never see, that all good men show their goodness in

the same way, by doing the same kind of good actions? Let them be English or French, black or white, if they be good, there is the same honesty, the same truthfulness, the same love, the same mercy in all; and what is right and good for you and me, now and here, is right and good for every man, everywhere, and at all times for ever. Surely, surely, what is noble, and loveable, and admirable now, was so five thousand years ago, and will be five thousand years hence. What is honourable for us here, would be equally honourable for us in America or Australia—ay, or in the farthest star in the skies.

But, some of you may say, men at different times and in different countries have had very different notions—indeed quite opposite notions, of what men ought to be.

I know that some people say so. I can only answer that I differ from them. True, some men have had less light than others, and, God knows, have made fearful mistakes enough, and fancied that they could please God by behaving like devils: but on the first principles of goodness, all the world has been pretty well agreed all along; for wherever men have been taught what is really right, there have been plenty of hearts to answer, ‘Yes, this is good! this is what we have wanted all along, though we knew it not.’

And all the wisest men among the heathen—the men who have been honoured, and even worshipped as blessings to their fellow men, have agreed, one and all, in the great and golden rule, ‘Thou shalt love God, with all thy heart and soul, and thy neighbour as thyself.’

Believe about this as you may, my friends, still I believe, and will believe; I preach, and will preach, this, and nought else but this:—That there is but one everlasting goodness, which is good in men, good in all rational beings—yea, good in God himself.

These last are solemn words, but they are true; and the more you think over them, the more, I tell you, will you find them true.

And to them I have been trying to lead you; and will try once more.

For, did it never strike you, again—as it has me—and all the world has looked different to me since I found it out—that there must be ONE, in whom all goodness is gathered together; ONE, who must be perfectly and absolutely good? And did it never strike you, that all the goodness in the world must, in some way or other, come from HIM? I believe that our hearts and reasons, if we will listen fairly to them, tell us that it must be so; and I am certain that the Bible tells us so, from beginning to end.

When we see the million rain-drops of the shower, we say, with reason, there must be one great sea from which all these drops have come. When we see the countless rays of light, we say, with reason, there must be one great central sun from which all these are shed forth. And when we see, as it were, countless drops, and countless rays of goodness scattered about in the world, a little good in this man, and a little good in that, shall we not say, there must be one great sea, one central sun of goodness, from whence all human goodness comes? And where can that centre of goodness be, but in the very character of God himself?

Yes, my friends; if you would know what God is, think of all the noble, beautiful, loveable actions, tempers, feelings, which you ever saw or heard of. Think of all the good, and admirable, and loveable people whom you ever met; and fancy to yourselves all that goodness, nobleness, admirableness, loveableness, and millions of times more, gathered together in one, to make one perfectly good character—and then you have some faint notion of God, some dim sight of God, who is the eternal and perfect Goodness.

It is but a faint notion, no doubt, that the best man can have of God's goodness, so dull has sin made our hearts and brains: but let us comfort ourselves with this thought—That the more we learn to love what is good, the more we accustom ourselves to think of good people and good things, and to ask ourselves why and how this action and that is good, the more shall we be able to see the goodness of God. And to see that, even for a moment, is worth all sights in earth or heaven.

Worth all sights, indeed. No wonder that the saints of old called it the 'Beatific Vision,' that is, the sight which makes a man utterly blessed; namely, to see, if but for a moment, with his mind's eye what God is like, and behold he is utterly good!

No wonder that they said (and I doubt not that they spoke honestly and simply what they felt) that while that thought was before them, this world was utterly nothing to them; that they were as men in a dream, or dead, not caring to eat or to move, for fear of losing that glorious thought; but felt as if they were

(as they were most really and truly) caught up into heaven, and taken utterly out of themselves by the beauty and glory of God's perfect goodness. No wonder that they cried out with David, 'Whom have I in heaven, O Lord, but Thee? and there is none on earth whom I desire in comparison of Thee.' No wonder that they said with St. Peter when he saw our Lord's glory, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here,' and felt like men gazing upon some glorious picture or magnificent show, off which they cannot take their eyes; and which makes them forget for the time all beside in heaven and earth.

And it was good for them to be there: but not too long. Man was sent into this world not merely to see, but to do; and the more he sees, the more he is bound to go and do accordingly.

St. Peter had to come down from the mount, and preach the Gospel wearily for many a year, and die at last upon the cross. St. Augustine, in like wise, though he would gladly have lived and died doing nothing but fixing his soul's eye steadily on the glory of God's goodness, had to come down from the mount likewise, and work, and preach, and teach, and wear himself out in daily drudgery for that God whom he learnt to serve, even when he could not adore Him in the press of business, and the bustle of a rotten and dying world.

But see, my dear friends, and consider it well—Before a man can come to that state of mind, or anything like it, he must have begun by loving goodness wherever he saw it; and have settled in his heart that to be good, and therefore to do good, is the

most beautiful thing in the world. So he will begin by loving his brother whom he has seen, and by taking delight in good people, and in all honest, true, loving, merciful, generous words and actions, and in those who say and do them. And so he will be fit to love God, whom he has not seen, when he finds out (as God grant that you may all find out) that all goodness of which we can conceive, and far, far more, is gathered together in God, and flows out from him eternally over his whole creation, by that Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is the Lord and Giver of life, and therefore of goodness. For goodness is nothing else, if you will receive it, but the eternal life of God, which he has lived, and lives now, and will live for evermore, God blessed for ever. Amen.

So, my dear friends, it will not be so difficult for you to love God, if you will only begin by loving goodness, which is God's likeness, and the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. For you will be like a man who has long admired a beautiful picture of some one whom he does not know, and at last meets the person for whom the picture was meant—and behold the living face is a thousand times more fair and noble than the painted one. You will be like a child which has been brought up from its birth in a room into which the sun never shone; and then goes out for the first time, and sees the sun in all his splendour bathing the earth with glory. If that child had loved to watch the dim narrow rays of light which shone into his dark room, what will he not feel at the sight of that sun from which all those rays had come Just so

will they feel who, having loved goodness for its own sake, and loved their neighbours for the sake of what little goodness is in them, have their eyes opened at last to see all goodness, without flaw or failing, bound or end, in the character of God, which he has shown forth in Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the likeness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.

SERMON II.

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

John xvii. 1

Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.

I spoke to you lately of the beatific vision of God. I will speak of it again to-day; and say this.

If any man wishes to see God, truly and fully, with the eyes of his soul: if any man wishes for that beatific vision of God; that perfect sight of God's perfect goodness; then must that man go, and sit down at the foot of Christ's cross, and look steadfastly upon him who hangs thereon. And there he will see, what the wisest and best among the heathen, among the Mussulmans, among all who are not Christian men, never have seen, and cannot see unto this day, however much they may feel (and some of them, thank God, do feel) that God is the Eternal Goodness, and must be loved accordingly.

And what shall we see upon the cross?

Many things, friends, and more than I, or all the preachers in the world, will be able to explain to you, though we preached till

the end of the world. But one thing we shall see, if we will, which we have forgotten sadly, Christians though we be, in these very days; forgotten it, most of us, so utterly, that in order to bring you back to it, I must take a seemingly roundabout road.

Does it seem, or does it not seem, to you, that the finest thing in a man is magnanimity—what we call in plain English, greatness of soul? And if it does seem to you to be so, what do you mean by greatness of soul? When you speak of a great soul, and of a great man, what manner of man do you mean?

Do you mean a very clever man, a very far-sighted man, a very determined man, a very powerful man, and therefore a very successful man? A man who can manage everything, and every person whom he comes across, and turn and use them for his own ends, till he rises to be great and glorious—a ruler, king, or what you will?

Well—he is a great man: but I know a greater, and nobler, and more glorious stamp of man; and you do also. Let us try again, and think if we can find his likeness, and draw it for ourselves.

Would he not be somewhat like this pattern?—A man who was aware that he had vast power, and yet used that power not for himself but for others; not for ambition, but for doing good?

Surely the man who used his power for other people would be the greater-souled man, would he not? Let us go on, then, to find out more of his likeness. Would he be stern, or would he be tender? Would he be patient, or would he be fretful? Would he be a man who stands fiercely on his own rights, or would he

be very careful of other men's rights, and very ready to waive his own rights gracefully and generously? Would he be extreme to mark what was done amiss against him, or would he be very patient when he was wronged himself, though indignant enough if he saw others wronged? Would he be one who easily lost his temper, and lost his head, and could be thrown off his balance by one foolish man? Surely not. He would be a man whom no fool, nor all fools together could throw off his balance; a man who could not lose his temper, could not lose his self-respect; a man who could bear with those who are peevish, make allowances for those who are weak and ignorant, forgive those who are insolent, and conquer those who are ungrateful, not by punishment, but by fresh kindness, overcoming their evil by his good.—A man, in short, whom no ill-usage without, and no ill-temper within, could shake out of his even path of generosity and benevolence.

Is not that the truly magnanimous man; the great and royal soul? Is not that the stamp of man whom we should admire, if we met him on earth? Should we not reverence that man; esteem it an honour and a pleasure to work under that man, to take him for our teacher, our leader, in hopes that, by copying his example, our souls might become great like his?

Is it so, my friends? Then know this, that in admiring that man, you admire the likeness of God. In wishing to be like that man, you wish to be like God.

For this is God's true greatness; this is God's true glory; this is God's true royalty; the greatness, glory, and royalty of loving,

forgiving, generous power, which pours itself out, untiring and undisgusted, in help and mercy to all which he has made; the glory of a Father who is perfect in this, that he causeth his rain to fall on the evil and on the good, and his sun to shine upon the just and on the unjust, and is good to the unthankful and the evil, a Father who has not dealt with us after our sins, or rewarded us after our iniquities: a Father who is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, but whom it is worth while to fear, for with him is mercy and plenteous redemption;—all this, and more—a Father who so loved a world which had forgotten him, a world whose sins must have been disgusting to him, that he spared not his only begotten Son, but freely gave him for us, and will with him freely give us all things; a Father, in one word, whose name and essence is love, even as it is the name and essence of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

This, my friends, is the glory of God: but this glory never shone out in its full splendour till it shone upon the cross.

For—that we may go back again, to that great-souled man, of whom I spoke just now—did we not leave out one thing in his character? or at least, one thing by which his character might be proved and tried? We said that he should be generous and forgiving; we said that he should bear patiently folly, peevishness, ingratitude: but what if we asked of him, that he should sacrifice himself utterly for the peevish, ungrateful men for whose good he was toiling? What if we asked him to give up, for them, not only all which made life worth having, but to give up life itself?

To die for them; and, what is bitterest of all, to die by their hands—to receive as their reward for all his goodness to them a shameful death? If he dare submit to that, then we should call his greatness of soul perfect. Magnanimity, we should say, could rise no higher; in that would be the perfection of goodness.

Surely your hearts answer, that this is true. When you hear of a father sacrificing his own life for his children; when you hear of a soldier dying for his country; when you hear of a clergyman or a physician killing himself by his work, while he is labouring to save the souls or the bodies of his fellow-creatures; then you feel—There is goodness in its highest shape. To give up our lives for others is one of the most beautiful, and noble, and glorious things on earth. But to give up our lives, willingly, joyfully for men who misunderstand us, hate us, despise us, is, if possible, a more glorious action still, and the very perfection of perfect virtue. Then, looking at Christ's cross, we see that, and even more—ay, far more than that. The cross was the perfect token of the perfect greatness of God, and of the perfect glory of God.

So on the cross, the Father justified himself to man; yea, glorified himself in the glory of his crucified Son. On the cross God proved himself to be perfectly just, perfectly good, perfectly generous, perfectly glorious, beyond all that man could ever have dared to conceive or dream. That God must be good, the wise heathens knew; but that God was so utterly good that he could stoop to suffer, to die, for men, and by men—that they never dreamed. That was the mystery of God's love, which was hid in

Christ from the foundation of the world, and which was revealed at last upon the cross of Calvary by him who prayed for his murderers—‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ That truly blessed sight of a Saviour-God, who did not disdain to die the meanest and the most fearful of deaths—that, that came home at once, and has come home ever since, to all hearts which had left in them any love and respect for goodness, and melted them with the fire of divine love; as God grant it may melt yours, this day, and henceforth for ever.

I can say no more, my friends. If this good news does not come home to your hearts by its own power, it will never be brought home to you by any words of mine.

SERMON III.

THE LIFE OF GOD

1 John i. 2

For the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us!

What do we mean, when we speak of the Life everlasting?

Do we mean that men's souls are immortal, and will live for ever after death, either in happiness or misery?

We must mean more than that. At least we ought to mean more than that, if we be Christian men. For the Bible tells us, that Christ brought life and immortality to light. Therefore they must have been in darkness before Christ's coming; and men did not know as much about life and immortality before Christ's coming as they know—or ought to know—now.

But if we need only believe that we shall live for ever after death in happiness or misery, then Christ has not brought life and immortality to light. He has thrown no fresh light upon the matter.

And why? For this simple reason, that the old heathen knew as much as that before Christ came.

The old Greeks and Romans, and Persians, and our own forefathers before they became Christians, believed that men's souls would live for ever happy or miserable. The Mussulmans, Mahommedans, Turks as they are called in the Prayer-book, believe as much as that now. They believe that men's souls live for ever after death, and go to 'heaven' or 'hell.'

So those words 'everlasting Life' must needs mean something more than that. What do they mean?

First. What does everlasting mean?

It means exactly the same as eternal. The two words are the same: only everlasting is English, and eternal Latin. But they have the same sense.

Now everlasting and eternal mean something which has neither beginning nor end. That is certain. The wisest of the heathen knew that: but we are apt to forget it. We are apt to think a thing may be everlasting, because it has no end, though it has a beginning. We are careless thinkers, if we fancy that. God is eternal because he has neither beginning nor end.

But here come two puzzles.

First. The Athanasian Creed says that there is but one Eternal, that is, God; and never were truer words written.

But do we not make out two Eternals? For God is one Eternal; and eternal life is another Eternal. Now which is right; we, or the Athanasian Creed? I shall hold by the Athanasian Creed, my friends, and ask you to think again over the matter: thus—If there be but one Eternal, there is but one way of escaping out of

our puzzle, which makes two Eternals; and that is, to go back to the old doctrine of St. Paul, and St. John, and the wisest of the Fathers, and say—There is but one Eternal; and therefore eternal life is in the Eternal God. And it is eternal Life because it is God's life; the life which God lives; and it is eternal just because, and only because, it is the life of God; and eternal death is nothing but the want of God's eternal life.

Certainly, whether you think this true or not, St. John thought it true; for he says so most positively in the text. He says that the Life was manifested—showed plainly upon earth, and that he had seen it. And he says that he saw it in a man, whom his eyes had seen, and his hands had handled. How could that be?

My friends, how else could it be? How can you see life, but by seeing some one live it? You cannot see a man's life, unless you see him live such and such a life, or hear of his living such and such a life, and so knowing what his life, manners, character, are. And so no one could have seen God's life, or known what life God lived, and what character God's was, had it not been for the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made flesh, and dwelt among us, that by seeing him, the Son, we might see the Father, whose likeness he was, and is, and ever will be.

But now, says St. John, we know what God's eternal life is; for we know what Christ's life was on earth. And more, we know that it is a life which men may live; for Christ lived it perfectly and utterly, though He was a man.

What sort of life, then, is everlasting life?

Who can tell altogether and completely? And yet who cannot tell in part? Use the common sense, my friends, which God has given to you, and think;—If eternal life be the life of God, it must be a good life; for God is good. That is the first, and the most certain thing which we can say of it. It must be a righteous and just life; a loving and merciful life; for God is righteous, just, loving, merciful; and more, it must be an useful life, a life of good works; for God is eternally useful, doing good to all his creatures, working for ever for the benefit of all which he has made.

Yes—a life of good works. There is no good life without good works. When you talk of a man's life, you mean not only what he feels and thinks, but what he does. What is in his heart goes for nothing, unless he brings it out in his actions, as far as he can.

Therefore St. James says, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works. Shew me thy faith *without* thy works,' (and who can do that?) 'and I will shew thee my faith by my works.'

And St. John says, there is no use *saying* you love. 'Let us love not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth;' and again—and would to God that most people who talk so glibly about heaven and hell, and the ways of getting thither, would recollect this one plain text—'Little children, let no man deceive you. He that *doeth* righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous.'

And therefore it is that St. Paul bids rich men 'be rich also in noble deeds,' generous and liberal of their money to all who want, that they may 'lay hold of that which is really life,' namely, the eternal life of goodness.

And therefore also, my friends, we may be sure that God loves in deed and in truth: because it is written that God is love.

For if a man loves, he longs to help those whom he loves. It is the very essence of love, that it cannot be still, cannot be idle, cannot be satisfied with itself, cannot contain itself, but must go out to do good to those whom it loves, to seek and to save that which is lost. And therefore God is perfect love, and his eternal life a life of eternal love, because he sends his Son eternally to seek and to save that which is lost.

This, then, is eternal life; a life of everlasting love showing itself in everlasting good works; and whosoever lives that life, he lives the life of God, and hath eternal life.

What I have just said will help you, I think, to understand another royal text about eternal life.

For now' we may understand why it is written, that this is life eternal, to know the true and only God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. For if eternal life be God's life, we must know God, and God's character, to know what eternal life is like: and if no man has seen God at any time, and God's life can only be seen in the life of Christ, then we must know Christ, and Christ's life, to know God and God's life; that the saying may be fulfilled in us, God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

One other royal text, did I say? We may understand many, perhaps all, the texts which speak of life, and eternal life, if we will look at them in this way. We may see why St. Paul says that to be spiritually minded is life; and that the life of Jesus

may be manifested in men: and how the sin of the old heathen lay in this, that they were alienated from the life of God. We may understand how Christ's commandment is everlasting life; how the water which he gives, can spring up within a man's heart to everlasting life—all such texts we may, and shall, understand more and more, if we will bear in mind that everlasting life is the life of God and of Christ, a life of love; a life of perfect, active, self-sacrificing goodness, which is the one only true life for all rational beings, whether on earth or in heaven.

In heaven, my friends, as well as on earth. Form your own notions, as you will, about angels, and saints in heaven, for every one must have some notions about them, and try to picture to himself what the souls of those whom he has loved and lost are doing in the other world: but bear this in mind: that if the saints in heaven live the everlasting life, they must be living a life of usefulness, of love and of good works.

And here I must say, friends, that however much the Roman Catholics may be wrong on many points, they have remembered one thing about the life everlasting, which we are too apt to forget; and that is, that everlasting life cannot be a selfish, idle life, spent only in being happy oneself. They believe that the saints in heaven are *not* idle; that they are eternally helping mankind; doing all sorts of good offices for those souls who need them; that, as St. Paul says of the angels, they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. And I cannot see why they should not be right. For if the saints'

delight was to do good on earth, much more will it be to do good in heaven. If they helped poor sufferers, if they taught the ignorant, if they comforted the afflicted, here on earth, much more will they be able, much more will they be willing, to help, comfort, teach them, now that they are in the full power, the full freedom, the full love and zeal of the everlasting life. If their hearts were warmed and softened by the fire of God's love here, how much more there! If they lived God's life of love here, how much more there, before the throne of God, and the face of Christ!

But if any one shall say, that the souls of good men in heaven cannot help us who are here on earth, I answer, When did they ascend into heaven, to find out that? If they had ever been there, friends, be sure they would have had better news to bring home than this—that those whom we have honoured and loved on earth have lost the power which they used to have, of comforting us who are struggling here below. That notion springs altogether out of a superstitious fancy that heaven is a great many millions of miles away from this earth—which fancy, wherever men get it from, they certainly do not get it from the Bible. Moreover it seems to me, that if the saints in heaven cannot help men, then they cannot be happy in heaven. Cannot be happy? Ay, must be miserable. For what greater misery for really good men, than to see things going wrong, and not to be able to mend them; to see poor creatures suffering, and not to be able to comfort them? No, my friends, we will believe—what every one who loves a beloved

friend comes sooner or later to believe—that those whom we have honoured and loved, though taken from our eyes, are near to our spirits; that they still fight for us, under the banner of their Master Christ, and still work for us, by virtue of his life of love, which they live in him and by him for ever.

Pray to them, indeed, we need not, as if they would help us out of any self-will of their own. There, I think, the Roman Catholics are wrong. They pray to the saints as if the saints had wills of their own, and fancies of their own, and were respecters of persons; and could have favourites, and grant private favours to those who especially admired and (I fear I must say it) flattered them. But why should we do that? That is to lower God's saints in our own eyes. For if we believe that they are made perfect, and like perfectly the everlasting life, then we must believe that there is no self-will in them: but that they do God's will, and not their own, and go on God's errands, and not their own; that he, and not their own liking, sends them whithersoever he wills; and that if we ask of *him*—of God our Father himself, that is enough for us.

And what shall we ask?

Ask—'Father, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

For in asking that, we ask for the best of all things. We ask for the happiness, the power, the glory of saints and angels. We ask to be put into tune with God's whole universe, from the meanest flower beneath our feet, to the most glorious spirit whom God ever created. We ask for the one everlasting life which can never die, fail, change, or disappoint: yea, for the everlasting life which

Christ the only begotten Son lives from eternity to eternity, for ever saying to his Father, 'Thy will be done.'

Yes—when we ask God to make us do his will, then indeed we ask for everlasting life.

Does that seem little? Would you rather ask for all manner of pleasant things, if not in this life, at least in the life to come?

Oh, my friends, consider this. We were not put into this world to get pleasant things; and we shall not be put into the next world, as it seems to me, to get pleasant things. We were put into this world to do God's will. And we shall be put (I believe) into the next world for the very same purpose—to do God's will; and if we do that, we shall find pleasure enough in doing it. I do not doubt that in the next world all manner of harmless pleasure will come to us likewise; because that will be, we hope, a perfect and a just world, not a piecemeal, confused, often unjust world, like this: but pleasant things will come to us in the next life, only in proportion as we shall be doing God's will in the next life; and we shall be happy and blessed, only because we shall be living that eternal life of which I have been preaching to you all along, the life which Christ lives and has lived and will live for ever, saying to the Eternal Father—I come to do thy will—not my will but thine be done.

Oh! may God give to us all his Spirit; the Spirit by which Christ did his Father's will, and lived his Father's life in the soul and body of a mortal man, that we may live here a life of obedience and of good works, which is the only true and living

life of faith; and that when we die it may be said of us—‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.’

They rest from their labours. All their struggles, disappointments, failures, backslidings, which made them unhappy here, because they could not perfectly do the will of God, are past and over for ever. But their works follow them.

The good which they did on earth—that is not past and over. It cannot die. It lives and grows for ever, following on in their path long after they are dead, and bearing fruit unto everlasting life, not only in them, but in men whom they never saw, and in generations yet unborn.

SERMON IV

THE SONG OF THE THREE CHILDREN

Daniel iii. 16, 17, 18

O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

We read this morning, instead of the Te Deum, the Song of the Three Children, beginning, ‘Oh all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.’ It was proper to do so: because the Ananias, Azarias, and Misael mentioned in it, are the same as the Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, whose story we heard in the first lesson; and because some of the old Jews held that this noble hymn was composed by them, and sung by them in the burning fiery furnace, wherefore it has been called ‘The Song of the Three Children;’ for child, in old English, meant a young man.

Be that as it may, it is a glorious hymn, worthy of the Church of God, worthy of those three young men, worthy of all the noble army of martyrs; and if the three young men did not actually use the very words of it, still it was what they believed; and, because they believed it, they had courage to tell Nebuchadnezzar that they were not careful to answer him—had no manner of doubt or anxiety whatsoever as to what they were to say, when he called on them to worship his gods. For his gods, we know, were the sun, moon, and planets, and the angels who (as the Chaldeans believed) ruled over the heavenly bodies; and that image of gold is supposed, by some learned men, to have been probably a sign or picture of the wondrous power of life and growth which there is in all earthly things—and that a sign of which I need not speak, or you hear. So that the meaning of this Song of the Three Children is simply this:

‘You bid us worship the things about us, which we see with our bodily eyes. We answer, that we know the one true God, who made all these things; and that, therefore, instead of worshipping *them*, we will bid them to worship *him*.’

Now let us spend a few minutes in looking into this hymn, and seeing what it teaches us.

You see at once, that it says that the one God, and not many gods, made all things: much more, that things did not make themselves, or grow up of their own accord, by any virtue or life of their own.

But it says more. It calls upon all things which God has made,

to bless him, praise him, and magnify him for ever. This is much more than merely saying, 'One God made the world.' For this is saying something about God's character; declaring what this one God is like.

For when you bless a person—(I do not mean when you pray God to bless him—that is a different thing)—when you bless any one, I say, you bless him because he is blessed, and has done blessed things: because he has shown himself good, generous, merciful, useful. You praise a person because he is praiseworthy, noble, and admirable. You magnify a person—that is, speak of him to every one, and everywhere, in the highest terms—because you think that every one ought to know how good and great he is. And, therefore, when the hymn says, 'Bless God, praise him, and magnify him for ever,' it does not merely confess God's power. No. It confesses, too, God's wisdom, goodness, beauty, love, and calls on all heaven and earth to admire him, the alone admirable, and adore him, the alone adorable.

For this is really to believe in God. Not merely to believe that there is a God, but to know what God is like, and to know that He is worthy to be believed in; worthy to be trusted, honoured, loved with heart and mind and soul, because we know that He is worthy of our love.

And this, we have a right to say, these three young men did, or whosoever wrote this hymn; and that as a reward for their faith in God, there was granted to them that deep insight into the meaning of the world about them, which shines out through

every verse of this hymn.

Deep? I tell you, my friends, that this hymn is so deep, that it is too deep for the shallow brains of which the world is full now-a-days, who fancy that they know all about heaven and earth, just because they happen to have been born now, and not two hundred years ago. To such this old hymn means nothing; it is in their eyes merely an old-fashioned figure of speech to call on sun and stars, green herb and creeping thing, to praise and bless God. Nevertheless, the old hymn stands in our prayer-books, as a precious heir-loom to our children; and long may it stand.

Though we may forget its meaning, yet perhaps our children after us will recollect it once more, and say with their hearts, what we now, I fear, only say with our lips and should not say at all, if it was not put into our mouths by the Prayer-book.

Do you not understand what I mean? Then think of this:—

If we were writing a hymn about God, should we dare to say to the things about us—to the cattle feeding in the fields—much less to the clouds over our heads, and to the wells of which we drink, ‘Bless ye the Lord, praise him, and magnify him for ever?’

We should not dare; and for two reasons.

First—There is a notion abroad, borrowed from the old monks, that this earth is in some way bad, and cursed; that a curse is on it still for man’s sake: but a notion which is contrary to plain fact; for if we till the ground, it does *not* bring forth thorns and thistles to us, as the Scripture says it was to do for Adam, but wholesome food, and rich returns for our labour: and which

in the next place is flatly contrary to Scripture: for we read in Genesis viii. 21, how the Lord said, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake;' and the Psalms always speak of this earth, and of all created things, as if there was no curse at all on them; saying that 'all things serve God, and continue as they were at the beginning,' and that 'He has given them a law which cannot be broken;' and in the face of those words, let who will talk of the earth being cursed, I will not; and you shall not, if I can help it.

Another reason why we dare not talk of this earth as this hymn does is, that we have got into the habit of saying, 'Cattle and creeping things—they are not rational beings. How can they praise God? Clouds and wells—they are not even living things. How can they praise God? Why speak of them in a hymn; much less speak to them?'

Yet this hymn does speak to them; and so do the Psalms and the Prophets again and again. And so will men do hereafter, when the fashions and the fancies of these days are past, and men have their eyes opened once more to see the glory which is around them from their cradle to their grave, and hear once more 'The Word of the Lord walking among the trees of the garden.'

But how can this be? How can not only dumb things, but even dead things, praise God?

My friends, this is a great mystery, of which the wisest men as yet know but little, and confess freely how little they know. But this at least we know already, and can say boldly—all

things praise God, by fulfilling the law which our Lord himself declared, when he said 'Not every one who saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.'

By doing the will of the heavenly Father. By obeying the laws which God has given them. By taking the shape which he has appointed for them. By being of the use for which he intended them. By multiplying each after their kind, by laws and means a thousand times more strange than any signs and wonders of which man can fancy for himself; and by thus showing forth God's boundless wisdom, goodness, love, and tender care of all which he has made.

Yes, my friends, in this sense (and this is the true sense) all things can serve and praise God, and all things do serve and praise Him. Not a cloud which fleets across the sky, not a clod of earth which crumbles under the frost, not a blade of grass which breaks through the snow in spring, not a dead leaf which falls to the earth in autumn, but is doing God's work, and showing forth God's glory. Not a tiny insect, too small to be seen by human eyes without the help of a microscope, but is as fearfully and wonderfully made as you and me, and has its proper food, habitation, work, appointed for it, and not in vain. Nothing is idle, nothing is wasted, nothing goes wrong, in this wondrous world of God. The very scum upon the standing pool, which seems mere dirt and dust, is all alive, peopled by millions of creatures, each full of beauty, full of use, obeying laws of God

too deep for us to do aught but dimly guess at them; and as men see deeper and deeper into the mystery of God's creation, they find in the commonest things about them wonder and glory, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive; and can only say with the Psalmist, 'Oh Lord, thy ways are infinite, thy thoughts are very deep;' and confess that the grass beneath their feet, the clouds above their heads—ay, every worm beneath the sod and bird upon the bough, do, in very deed and truth, bless the Lord who made them, praise him, and magnify him for ever, not with words indeed, but with works; and say to man all day long, 'Go thou, and do likewise.'

Yes, my friends, let us go and do likewise. If we wish really to obey the lesson of the Hymn of the Three Children, let us do the will of God: and so worship him in spirit and in truth.

Do not fancy, as too many do, that thou canst praise God by singing hymns to him in church once a week, and disobeying him all the week long, crying to him 'Lord, Lord,' and then living as if he were not thy Lord, but thou wast thine own Lord, and hadst a right to do thine own will, and not his. If thou wilt really bless God, then try to live his blessed life of Goodness. If thou wilt truly praise God, then behave as if God was praiseworthy, good, and right in what he bids thee do. If thou wouldest really magnify God, and declare his greatness, then behave as if he were indeed the Great God, who ought to be obeyed—ay, who *must* be obeyed; for his commandment is life, and it alone, to thee, as well as to all which He has made. Dost thou fancy as the heathen do,

that God needs to be flattered with fine words? or that thou wilt be heard for thy much speaking, and thy vain repetitions? He asks of thee works, as well as words; and more, He asks of thee works first, and words after. And better it is to praise him truly by works without words, than falsely by words without works.

Cry, if thou wilt, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts;’ but show that thou believest him to be holy, by being holy thyself.

Sing, if Thou wilt, of ‘The Father of an Infinite Majesty:’ but show that thou believest his majesty to be infinite, by obeying his commandments, like those Three Children, let them cost thee what they may. Join, and join freely, in the songs of the heavenly host; for God has given thee reason and speech, after the likeness of his only begotten Son, and thou mayest use them, as well as every other gift, in the service of thy Father. But take care lest, while thou art trying to copy the angels, thou art not even as righteous as the beasts of the field. For they bless and praise God by obeying his laws; and till thou dost that, and obeyest God’s laws likewise, thou art not as good as the grass beneath thy feet.

For after all has been said and sung, my friends, the sum and substance of true religion remains what it was, and what it will be for ever; and lies in this one word, ‘If ye love me, keep my commandments.’

SERMON V

THE ETERNAL GOODNESS

Matthew xxii. 39

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Why are wrong things wrong? Why, for instance, is it wrong to steal?

Because God has forbidden it, you may answer. But is it so? Whatsoever God forbids must be wrong. But, is it wrong because God forbids it, or does God forbid it because it is wrong?

For instance, suppose that God had not forbidden us to steal, would it be right then to steal, or at least, not wrong?

We must really think of this. It is no mere question of words, it is a solemn practical question, which has to do with our every-day conduct, and yet which goes down to the deepest of all matters, even to the depths of God himself.

The question is simply this. Did God, who made all things, make right and wrong? Many people think so. They think that God made goodness. But how can that be? For if God made goodness, there could have been no goodness before God made it. That is clear. But God was always good, good from all

eternity. But how could that be? How could God be good, before there was any goodness made? That notion will not do then. And all we can say is that goodness is eternal and everlasting, just as God is: because God was and is and ever will be eternally and always good.

But is eternal goodness one thing, and the eternal God, another? That cannot be, again; for as the Athanasian Creed tells us so wisely and well, there are not many Eternals, but one Eternal. Therefore goodness must be the Spirit of God; and God must be the Spirit of goodness; and right is nothing else but the character of the everlasting God, and of those who are inspired by God.

What is wrong, then? Whatever is unlike right; whatever is unlike goodness; whatever is unlike God; that is wrong. And why does God forbid us to do wrong? Simply because wrong is unlike himself. He is perfectly beautiful, perfectly blest and happy, because he is perfectly good; and he wishes to see all his creatures beautiful, blest, and happy: but they can only be so by being perfectly good; and they can only be perfectly good by being perfectly like God their Father; and they can only be perfectly like God the Father by being full of love, loving their neighbour as themselves.

For what do we mean when we talk of right, righteousness, goodness?

Many answers have been given to that question.

The old Romans, who were a stern, legal-minded people, used

to say that righteousness meant to hurt no man, and to give every man his own. The Eastern people had a better answer still, which our blessed Lord used in one place, when he told them that righteousness was to do to other people as we would they should do to us: but the best answer, the perfect answer, is our Lord's in the text, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This is the true, eternal righteousness. Not a legal righteousness, not a righteousness made up of forms and ceremonies, of keeping days holy, and abstaining from meats, or any other arbitrary commands, whether of God or of man. This is God's goodness, God's righteousness, Christ's own goodness and righteousness.

Do you not see what I mean? Remember only one word of St. John's. God is love. Love is the goodness of God. God is perfectly good, because he is perfect love. Then if you are full of love, you are good with the same goodness with which God is good, and righteous with Christ's righteousness. That as what St. Paul wished to be, when he wished to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith in Christ. His own righteousness was the selfish and self-conceited righteousness which he had before his conversion, made up of forms, and ceremonies, and doctrines, which made him narrow-hearted, bigoted, self-conceited, fierce, cruel, a persecutor; the righteousness which made him stand by in cold blood to see St. Stephen stoned. But the righteousness which is by faith in Christ is a loving heart, and a loving life, which every man will long to lead who believes really in Jesus

Christ. For when he looks at Christ, Christ's humiliation, Christ's work, Christ's agony, Christ's death, and sees in it nothing but utter and perfect *Love* to poor sinful, undeserving man, then his heart makes answer, Yes, I believe in that! I believe and am sure that that is the most beautiful character in the world; that that is the utterly noble and right sort of person to be—full of love as Christ was. I ought to be like that. My conscience tells me that I ought. And I can be like that. Christ, who was so good himself, must wish to make me good like himself, and I can trust him to do it. I can have faith in him, that he will make me like himself, full of the Spirit of love, without which I shall be only useless and miserable. And I trust him enough to be sure that, good as he is, he cannot mean to leave me useless or miserable. So, by true faith in Christ, the man comes to have Christ's righteousness—that is, to be loving as Christ was. He believes that Christ's loving character is perfect beauty; that he must be the Son of God, if his character be like that. He believes that Christ can and will fill him with the same spirit of love; and as he believes, so is it with him, and in him those words are fulfilled, 'Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God;' and that 'If a man love me,' says the Lord, 'I and my Father will come to him, and take up our abode with him.' Those are wonderful words: but if you will recollect what I have just said, you may understand a little of them. St. John puts the same thing very simply, but very boldly. 'God is Love,' he says, 'and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in

him.' Strange as it may seem, it must be so if God be love. Let us thank God that it is true, and keep in mind what awful and wonderful creatures we are, that God should dwell in us; what blessed and glorious creatures we may become in time, if we will only listen to the voice of God who speaks within our hearts.

And what does that voice say? The old commandment, my friends, which was from the beginning, 'Love one another.'

Whatever thoughts or feeling in your hearts contradict that; whatever tempts you to despise your neighbour, to be angry with him, to suspect him, to fancy him shut out from God's love, that is not of God. No voice in our hearts is God's voice, but what says in some shape or other, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself. Care for him, bear with him long, and try to do him good.'

For love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. Still less can he who is not loving fulfil the law; for the law of God is the very pattern and picture of God's character; and if a man does not know what God is like, he will never know what God's law is like; and though he may read his Bible all day long, he will learn no more from it than a dumb animal will, unless his heart is full of love. For love is the light by which we see God, by which we understand his Bible; by which we understand our duty, and God's dealings, in the world. Love is the light by which we understand our own hearts; by which we understand our neighbours' hearts. So it is. If you hate any man, or have a spite against him, you will never know what is in that man's heart,

never be able to form a just opinion of his character. If you want to understand human beings, or to do justice to their feelings, you must begin by loving them heartily and freely, and the more you like them the better you will understand them, and in general the better you will find them to be at heart, the more worthy of your trust, at least the more worthy of your compassion.

At least, so St. John says, 'He that saith he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even till now, and knoweth not whither he goeth. But he that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him.'

No occasion of stumbling. That is of making mistakes in our behaviour to our neighbours, which cause scandal, drive them from us, and make them suspect us, dislike us—and perhaps with too good reason. Just think for yourselves. What does half the misery, and all the quarrelling in the world come from, but from people's loving themselves better than their neighbours? Would children be disobedient and neglectful to their parents, if they did not love themselves better than their parents? Why does a man kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet his neighbour's goods, his neighbour's custom, his neighbour's rights, but because he loves his own pleasure or interest better than his neighbour's, loves himself better than the man whom he wrongs?

Would a man take advantage of his neighbour if he loved him as well as himself? Would he be hard on his neighbour, and say, Pay me the uttermost farthing, if he loved him as he loves himself?

Would he speak evil of his neighbour behind his back, if he

loved him as himself? Would he cross his neighbour's temper, just because he *will* have his own way, right or wrong, if he loved him as himself? Judge for yourselves. What would the world become like this moment if every man loved his neighbour as himself, thought of his neighbour as much as he thinks of himself? Would it not become heaven on earth at once? There would be no need then for soldiers and policemen, lawyers, rates and taxes, my friends, and all the expensive and heavy machinery which is now needed to force people into keeping something of God's law. Ay, there would be no need of sermons, preachers and prophets to tell men of God's law, and warn them of the misery of breaking it. They would keep the law of their own free-will, by love. For love is the fulfilling of the law; and as St. Augustine says, 'Love you neighbour, and then do what you will—because you will be sure to will what is right.' So truly did our Lord say, that on this one commandment hung all the law and the prophets.

But though that blessed state of things will not come to the whole world till the day when Christ shall reign in that new heaven and new earth, in which Righteousness shall dwell, still it may come here, now, on earth, to each and every one of us, if we will but ask from God the blessed gift; to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

And then, my friends, whether we be rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, still that spirit of Love which is the Spirit of God, will be its exceeding great reward.

I say, its own reward.

For what is to be our reward, if we do our duty earnestly, however imperfectly? ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’

And what is the joy of our Lord? What is the joy of Christ?

The joy and delight which springs for ever in his great heart, from feeling that he is for ever doing good; from loving all, and living for all; from knowing that if not all, yet millions on millions are grateful to him, and will be for ever.

My friends, if you have ever done a kind action; if you have ever helped any one in distress, or given up a pleasure for the sake of others—do you not know that that deed gave you a peace, a self-content, a joy for the moment at least, which nothing in this world could give, or take away? And if the person whom you helped thanked you; if you felt that you had made that man your friend; that he trusted you now, looked on you now as a brother—did not that double the pleasure? I ask you, is there any pleasure in the world like that of doing good, and being thanked for it?

Then that is the joy of your Lord. That is the joy of Christ rising up in you, as often as you do good; the love which is in you rejoicing in itself, because it has found a loving thing to do, and has called out the love of a human being in return.

Yes, if you will receive it, that is the joy of Christ—the glorious knowledge that he is doing endless good, and calling out endless love to himself and to the Father, till the day when he shall give up to his Father the kingdom which he has won back

from sin and death, and God shall be all in all.

That is the joy of your Lord. If you wish for any different sort of joy after you die, you must not ask me to tell you of it; for I know nothing about the matter save what I find written in the Holy Scripture.

SERMON VI

WORSHIP

Isaiah i. 12, 13

When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

This is a very awful text; one of those which terrify us—or at least ought to terrify us—and set us on asking ourselves seriously and honestly—‘What do I believe after all? What manner of man am I after all? What sort of show should I make after all, if the people round me knew my heart and all my secret thoughts?

What sort of show, then, do I already make, in the sight of Almighty God, who sees every man exactly as he is?’

I say, such texts as this ought to terrify us. It is good to be terrified now and then; to be startled, and called to account, and set thinking, and sobered, as it were, now and then, that we may look at ourselves honestly and bravely, and see, if we can, what sort of men we are.

And therefore, perhaps, it is that this chapter is chosen for the

first Advent Lesson; to prepare us for Christmas; to frighten us somewhat; at least to set us thinking seriously, and to make us fit to keep Christmas in spirit and in truth.

For whom does this text speak of?

It speaks of religious people, and of a religious nation; and of a fearful mistake which they were making, and a fearful danger into which they had fallen. Now we are religious people, and England is a religious nation; and therefore we may possibly make the same mistake, and fall into the same danger, as these old Jews.

I do not say that we have done so; but we may; for human nature is just the same now as it was then; and therefore it is as well for us to look round—at least once now and then, and see whether we too are in danger of falling, while we think that we are standing safe.

What does Isaiah, then, tell the religious Jews of his day?

That their worship of God, their church-going, their sabbaths, and their appointed feasts were a weariness and an abomination to him. That God loathed them, and would not listen to the prayers which were made in them. That the whole matter was a mockery and a lie in his sight.

These are awful words enough—that God should hate and loathe what he himself had appointed; that what would be, one would think, one of the most natural and most pleasant sights to a loving Father in heaven—namely, his own children worshipping, blessing, and praising him—should be horrible in

his sight. There is something very shocking in that; at least to Church people like us. If we were Dissenters, who go to chapel chiefly to hear sermons, it would be easy for us to say—‘Of course, forms and ceremonies and appointed feasts are nothing to begin with; they are man’s invention at best, and may therefore be easily enough an abomination to God.’ But we know that they are not so; that forms and ceremonies and appointed feasts are good things as long as they have spirit and truth in them; that whether or not they be of man’s invention, they spring out of the most simple, wholesome wants of our human nature, which is a good thing and not a bad one, for God made it in his own likeness, and bestowed it on us. We know, or ought to know, that appointed feast days, like Christmas, are good and comfortable ordinances, which cheer our hearts on our way through this world, and give us something noble and lovely to look forward to month after month; that they are like landmarks along the road of life, reminding us of what God has done, and is doing, for us and all mankind. And if you do not know, I know, that people who throw away ordinances and festivals end, at least in a generation or two, in throwing away the Gospel truth which that ordinance or festival reminds us of; just as too many who have thrown away Good Friday have thrown away the Good Friday good news, that Christ died for all mankind; and too many who have thrown away Christmas are throwing away—often without meaning to do so—the Christmas good news, that Christ really took on himself the whole of our human nature, and took the manhood into God.

So it is, my friends, and so it will be. For these forms and festivals are the old landmarks and beacons of the Gospel; and if a man will not look at the landmarks, then he will lose his way.

Therefore, to Church people like us, it ought to be a shocking thing even to suspect that God may be saying to us, ‘Your appointed feasts my soul hateth;’ and it ought to set them seriously thinking how such a thing may happen, that they may guard against it. For if God be not pleased with our coming to his house, what right have we in his house at all?

But recollect this, my dear friends, that we are not to use this text to search and judge others’ faults, but to search and judge our own.

For if a man, hearing this sermon, looks at his neighbour across the church, and says in his heart, ‘Ay, such a bad one as he is—what right has he in church?’—then God answers that man, ‘Who art thou who judgest another? To his own master he standeth or falleth.’ Yes, my friends, recollect what the old tomb-stone outside says—(and right good doctrine it is)—and fit it to this sermon.

When this you see, pray judge not me
For sin enough I own.
Judge yourselves; mend your lives;
Leave other folks alone.

But if a man, hearing this sermon, begins to say to himself, Such a man as I am—so full of faults as I am—what right have I

in church? So selfish—so uncharitable—so worldly—so useless—so unfair (or whatever other faults the man may feel guilty of)—in one word, so unlike what I ought to be—so unlike Christ—so unlike God whom I come to worship. How little I act up to what I believe! how little I really believe what I have learnt! what right have I in church? What if God were saying the same of me as he said of those old Jews, ‘Thy church-going, thy coming to communion, thy Christmas-day, my soul hateth; I am weary to bear it. Who hath required this at thy hands, to tread my courts?’

People round me may think me good enough as men go now; but I know myself too well; and I know that instead of saying with the Pharisee to any man here, ‘I thank God that I am not as this man or that,’ I ought rather to stand afar off like the publican, and not lift up so much as my eyes toward heaven, crying only ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner.’

If a man should think thus, my friends, his thoughts may make him very serious for awhile; nay, very sad. But they need not make him miserable: need still less make him despair.

They ought to set him on thinking—Why do I come to church?

Because it is the fashion?

Because I want to hear the preacher?

No—to worship God.

But what is worshipping God?

That must depend entirely my friends, upon who God is.

As I often tell you, most questions—ay, if you will receive it,

all questions—depend upon this one root question, who is God?

But certainly this question of worshipping God must depend upon who God is. For how he ought to be worshipped depends on what will please him. And what will please him, depends on what his character is.

If God be, as some fancy, hard and arbitrary, then you must worship him in a way in which a hard arbitrary person would like to be addressed; with all crouching, and cringing, and slavish terror.

If God be again, as some fancy, cold, and hard of hearing, then you must worship him accordingly. You must cry aloud as Baal's priests did to catch his notice, and put yourselves to torment (as they did, and as many a Christian has done since) to move his pity; and you must use repetitions as the heathen do, and believe that you will be heard for your much speaking. The Lord Jesus called all such repetitions vain, and much speaking a fancy: but then, the Lord Jesus spoke to men of a Father in heaven, a very different God from such as I speak of—and, alas! some Christian people believe in.

But, my friends, if you believe in your heavenly Father, the good God whom your Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to you; and if you will consider that he is good, and consider what that word good means, then you will not have far to seek before you find what worship means, and how you can worship him in spirit and in truth.

For if God be good, worshipping him must mean praising and

admiring him—adoring him, as we call it—for being good.

And nothing more?

Certainly much more. Also to ask him to make us good. That, too, must be a part of worshipping a good God. For the very property of goodness is, that it wishes to make others good. And if God be good, he must wish to make us good also.

To adore God, then, for his goodness, and to pray to him to make us good, is the sum and substance of all wholesome worship.

And for that purpose a man may come to church, and worship God in spirit and in truth, though he be dissatisfied with himself, and ashamed of himself; and knows that he is wrong in many things:—provided always that he wishes to be set right, and made good.

For he may come saying, ‘O God, thou art good, and I am bad; and for that very reason I come. I come to be made good.

I admire thy goodness, and I long to copy it; but I cannot unless thou help me. Purge me; make me clean. Cleanse thou me from my secret faults, and give me truth in the inward parts. Do what thou wilt with me. Train me as thou wilt. Punish me if it be necessary. Only make me good.’

Then is the man fit indeed to come to church, sins and all:—if he carry his sins into church not to carry them out again safely and carefully, as we are all too apt to do, but to cast them down at the foot of Christ’s cross, in the hope (and no man ever hoped that hope in vain)—that he will be lightened of that burden, and

leave some of them at least behind him. Ay, no man, I say, ever hoped that in vain. No man ever yet felt the burden of his sins really intolerable and unbearable, but what the burden of his sins was taken off him before all was over, and Christ's righteousness given to him instead.

Then a man is fit, not only to come to church, but to come to Holy Communion on Christmas-day, and all days. For then and there he will find put into words for him the very deepest sorrows and longings of his heart. There he may say as heartily as he can (and the more heartily the better), 'I acknowledge and bewail my manifold sins and wickedness. The remembrance of them is grievous unto me; the burden of them is intolerable:' but there he will hear Christ promising in return to pardon and deliver him from all his sins, to confirm and strengthen him in all goodness.

That last is what he ought to want; and if he wants it, he will surely find it.

He may join there with the whole universe of God in crying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory:' and still in the same breath he may confess again his unworthiness so much as to gather up the crumbs under God's table, and cast himself simply and utterly upon the eternal property of God's eternal essence, which is—always to have mercy. But he will hear forthwith Christ's own answer—'If thou art bad, I can and will make thee good. My blood shall wash away thy sin: my body shall preserve thee, body, soul, and spirit, to the everlasting life of goodness.'

And so God will bless that man's communion to him; and bless to him his keeping of Christmas-day; because out of a true penitent heart and lively faith he will be offering to the good God the sacrifice of his own bad self, that God may take it, and make it good; and so will be worshipping the everlasting and infinite Goodness, in spirit and in truth.

SERMON VII

GOD'S INHERITANCE

Gal. iv. 6, 7

Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

This is the second good news of Christmas-day.

The first is, that the Son of God became man.

The second is, why he became man. That men might become the sons of God through him.

Therefore St. Paul says, You are the sons of God. Not—you may be, if you are very good: but you are, in order that you may become very good. Your being good does not tell you that you are the sons of God: your baptism tells you so. Your baptism gives you a right to say, I am the child of God. How shall I behave then? What ought a child of God to be like? Now St. Paul, you see, knew well that we could not make ourselves God's children by any feelings, fancies, or experiences of our own. But he knew just as well that we cannot make ourselves behave as God's children should, by any thoughts and trying of our own.

God alone made us His children; God alone can make us behave like his children.

And therefore St. Paul says, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: by which we cry to God, Our Father.

But some will say, Have we that Spirit?

St. Paul says that you have: and surely he speaks truth.

Let us search, then, and see where that Spirit is in us. It is a great and awful honour for sinful men: but I do believe that if we seek, we shall find that He is not far from any one of us, for in Him we live and move, and have our being; and all in us which is not ignorance, falsehood, folly, and filth, comes from Him.

Now the Bible says that this Spirit is the Spirit of God's Son, the Spirit of Christ:—and what sort of Spirit is that?

We may see by remembering what sort of a Spirit Christ had when on earth; for He certainly has the same Spirit now—the Spirit which proceedeth everlastingly from the Father and from the Son.

And what was that Like? What was Christ Like? What was his Spirit Like? It was a Spirit of Love, mercy, pity, generosity, usefulness, unselfishness. A spirit of truth, honour, fearless love of what was right: a spirit of duty and willing obedience, which made Him rejoice in doing His Father's will. In all things the spirit of a perfect *Son*, in all things a lovely, noble, holy spirit.

And now, my dear friends, is there nothing in you like that? You may forget it at times, you may disobey it very often: but is there not something in all your hearts more or less, which makes

you love and admire what is right?

When you hear of a noble action, is there nothing in you which makes you approve and admire it? Is there nothing in your hearts which makes you pity those who are in sorrow and long to help them? Nothing which stirs your heart up when you hear of a man's nobly doing his duty, and dying rather than desert his post, or do a wrong or mean thing? Surely there is—surely there is.

Then, O my dear friends, when those feelings come into your hearts, rejoice with trembling, as men to whom God has given a great and precious gift. For they are none other than the Spirit of the Son of God, striving with your hearts that He may form Christ in you, and raise up your hearts to cry with full faith to God, 'My Father which art in heaven!'

'Ah but,' you will say, 'we like what is right, but we do not always do it. We like to see pity and mercy: but we are very often proud and selfish and tyrannical. We like to see justice and honour: but we are too apt to be mean and unjust ourselves.

We like to see other people doing their duty: but we very often do not do ours.'

Well, my dear friends, perhaps that is true. If it be, confess your sins like honest men, and they shall be forgiven you. If you can so complain of yourselves, I am sure I can of myself, ten times more.

But do you not see that this very thing is a sign to you that the good and noble thoughts in you are not your own but God's?

If they came out of your own spirits, then you would have no

difficulty in obeying them. But they came out of God's Spirit; and our sinful and self-willed spirits are striving against his, and trying to turn away from God's light. What can we do then?

We can cherish those noble thoughts, those pure and higher feelings, when they arise. We can welcome them as heavenly medicine from our heavenly Father. We can resolve not to turn away from them, even though they make us ashamed. Not to grieve the Spirit of the Son of God, even though he grieves us (as he ought to do and will do more and more), by showing us our own weakness and meanness, and how unlike we are to Christ, the only begotten Son.

If we shut our hearts to those good feelings, they will go away and leave us. And if they do, we shall neither respect our neighbours, nor respect ourselves. We shall see no good in our neighbours, but become scornful and suspicious to them; and if we do that, we shall soon see no good in ourselves. We shall become discontented with ourselves, more and more given up to angry thoughts and mean ways, which we hate and despise, all the while that we go on in them.

And then—mark my words—we shall lose all real feeling of God being our Father, and we his sons. We shall begin to fancy ourselves his slaves, and not his children; and God our taskmaster, and not our Father. We shall dislike the thought of God. We shall long to hide from God. We shall fall back into slavish terror, and a fearful looking forward to of judgment and fiery indignation, because we have trampled under foot the grace

of God, the noble, pure, tender, and truly graceful feelings which God's Spirit bestowed on us, to fill us with the grace of Christ.

Therefore, my dear friends, never check any good or right feelings in yourselves, or in your children; for they come from the spirit of the Son of God himself. But, as St. Paul says, Phil. iv. 3, 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, what soever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things', . . . 'and the God of peace shall be with you.' Avoid all which can make you mean, low, selfish, cruel. Cling to all which can fill your mind with lofty, kindly, generous, loyal thoughts; and so, in God's good time, you will enter into the meaning of those great words—Abba, Father. The more you give up your hearts to such good feelings, the more you will understand of God; the more nobleness there is in you, the more you will see God's nobleness, God's justice, God's love, God's true glory. The more you become like God's Son, the more you will understand how God can stoop to call himself your Father; and the more you will understand what a Father, what a perfect Father God is. And in the world to come, I trust, you will enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God—that liberty which comes, as I told you last Sunday, not from doing your own will, but the will of God; that glory which comes, not from having anything of your own to pride yourselves upon, but from being filled with the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, by which you shall for ever look

up freely, and yet reverently, to the Almighty God of heaven and earth, and say, 'Impossible as the honour seems for man, yet thou, O God, hast said it, and it is true. Thou, even thou art my Father, and I thy son in Jesus Christ, who became awhile the Son of man on earth, that I might become for ever the son of God in heaven.'

And so will come true to us St. Paul's great words:—If we be sons, then heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ.

Heirs of God: but what is our inheritance? The same as Christ's.

And what is Christ's inheritance? What but God himself?—The knowledge of our Father in heaven, of his love to us, and of his eternal beauty and glory, which fills all heavens and all worlds with light and life.

SERMON VIII

‘DE PROFUNDIS.’

Psalm cxxx. 1

Out of the deep have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord,
hear my voice.

What is this deep of which David speaks so often? He knew it well, for he had been in it often and long. He was just the sort of man to be in it often. A man with great good in him, and great evil; with very strong passions and feelings, dragging him down into the deep, and great light and understanding to show him the dark secrets of that horrible pit when he was in it; and with great love of God too, and of order, and justice, and of all good and beautiful things, to make him feel the horribleness of that pit where he ought not to be, all the more from its difference, its contrast, with the beautiful world of light, and order, and righteousness where he ought to be. Therefore he knew that deep well, and abhorred it, and he heaps together every ugly name, to try and express what no man can express, the horror of that place. It is a horrible pit, mire and clay, where he can find no footing, but sinks all the deeper for his struggling. It is a place

of darkness and of storms, a shoreless and bottomless sea, where he is drowning, and drowning, while all God's waves and billows go over him. It is a place of utter loneliness, where he sits like a sparrow on the housetop, or a doleful bird in the desert, while God has put his lovers and friends away from him, and hid his acquaintance out of his sight, and no man cares for his soul, and all men seem to him liars, and God himself seems to have forgotten him and forgotten all the world. It is a dreadful net which has entangled his feet, a dark prison in which he is set so fast that he cannot get forth. It is a torturing disgusting disease, which gives his flesh no health, and his bones no rest, and his wounds are putrid and corrupt. It is a battle-field after the fight, where he seems to lie stript among the dead, like those who are wounded and cut away from God's hand, and lies groaning in the dust of death, seeing nothing round him but doleful shapes of destruction and misery, alone in the outer darkness, while a horrible dread overwhelms him. Yea, it is hell itself, the pit of hell, the nethermost hell, he says, where God's wrath burns like fire, till his tongue cleaves to his gums, and his bones are burnt up like a firebrand, till he is weary of crying; his throat is dry, his heart fails him for waiting so long upon his God.

Yes. A dark and strange place is that same deep pit of God—if, indeed, it be God's and God made it. Perhaps God did not make it. For God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good: and that pit cannot be very good; for all good things are orderly, and in shape; and in that pit is no shape, no

order, nothing but contradiction and confusion. When a man is in that pit, it will seem to him as if he were alone in the world, and longing above all things for company; and yet he will hate to have any one to speak to him, and wrap himself up in himself to brood over his own misery. When he is in that pit he shall be so blind that he can see nothing, though his eyes be open in broad noon-day. When he is in that pit he will hate the thing which he loves most, and love the thing which he hates most. When he is in that pit he will long to die, and yet cling to life desperately, and be horribly afraid of dying. When he is in that pit it will seem to him that God is awfully, horribly near him, and he will try to hide from God, try to escape from under God's hand: and yet all the while that God seems so dreadfully near him, God will seem further off from him than ever, millions and millions of miles away, parted from him by walls of iron, and a great gulf which he can never pass. There is nothing but contradiction in that pit: the man who is in it is of two minds about himself, and his kin and neighbours, and all heaven and earth; and knows not where to turn, or what to think, or even where he is at all.

For the food which he gets in that deep pit is very hunger of soul, and rage, and vain desires. And the ground which he stands on in that deep is a bottomless quagmire, and doubt, and change, and shapeless dread. And the air which he breathes in that deep is the very fire of God, which burns up everlastingly all the chalk and dross of the world.

I said that that deep was not merely the deep of affliction. No:

for you may see men with every comfort which wealth and home can give, who are tormented day and night in that deep pit in the midst of all their prosperity, calling for a drop of water to cool their tongue, and finding none. And you may see poor creatures dying in agony on lonely sick beds, who are not in that pit at all, but in that better place whereof it is written, 'Blessed are they who, going through the vale of misery, use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water;' and again, 'If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink;' and 'the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting life.'

No—that deep pit is a far worse place; an utterly bad place; and yet it may be good for a man to have fallen into it; and, strangely enough, if he do fall in, the lower he sinks in it, the better for him at last. That is another strange contradiction in that pit, which David found, that though it was a bottomless pit, the deeper he sank in it, the more likely he was to find his feet set on a rock; the further down in the nethermost hell he was, the nearer he was to being delivered from the nethermost hell.

Of course, if he had staid in that pit, he must have died, body and soul. No mortal man, or immortal soul could endure it long.

No immortal soul could; for he would lose all hope, all faith in God, all feeling of there being anything like justice and order in the world, all hope for himself, or for mankind, lying so in that living grave where no man can see God's righteousness, or his faithfulness in that land where all things are forgotten.

And his mere mortal body could not stand it. The misery

and terror and confusion of his soul would soon wear out his body, and he would die, as I have seen men actually die, when their souls have been left in that deep somewhat too long; shrink together into dark melancholy, and pine away, and die. And I have seen sweet young creatures too, whom God for some purpose of his own (which must be good and loving, for *He* did it) has let fall awhile into that deep of darkness; and then in compassion to their youth, and tenderness, and innocence, has lifted them gently out again, and set their weary feet upon the everlasting Rock, which is Christ; and has filled them with the light of his countenance, and joy and peace in believing; and has led them by green pastures and made them rest by the waters of comfort; and yet, though their souls were healed, their bodies were not. That fearful struggle has been too much for frail humanity, and they have drooped, and faded, and gone peacefully after a while home to their God, as a fair flower withers if the fire has but once past over it.

But some I have seen, men and women, who have arisen, like David, out of that strange deep, all the stronger for their fall; and have found out another strange contradiction about that deep, and the fire of God which burns below in it. For that fire hardens a man and softens him at the same time; and he comes out of it hardened to that hardness of which it is written, 'Do thou endure hardness like a good soldier of Jesus Christ;' and again, 'I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course:' yet softened to that softness of which

it is written, ‘Be ye tenderhearted, compassionate, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you;’—and again, ‘We have a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, seeing that he has been tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin.’

Happy, thrice happy are they who have thus walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and found it the path which leads to everlasting life. Happy are they who have thus writhed awhile in the fierce fire of God, and have had burnt out of them the chaff and dross, and all which offends, and makes them vain, light, and yet makes them dull, drags them down at the same time; till only the pure gold of God’s righteousness is left, seven times tried in the fire, incorruptible, and precious in the sight of God and man. Such people need not regret—they will not regret—all that they have gone through. It has made them brave, made them sober, made them patient. It has given them

The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;

and so has shaped them into the likeness of Christ, who was made perfect by suffering; and though he were a Son, yet in the days of his flesh, made strong supplication and crying with tears to his Father, and was heard in that he feared; and so, though he died on the cross and descended into hell, yet triumphed over death and hell, by dying and by descending; and conquered them

by submitting to them. And yet they have been softened in that fierce furnace of God's wrath, into another likeness of Christ—which after all is still the same; the character which he showed when he wept by the grave of Lazarus, and over the sinful city of Jerusalem; which he showed when his heart yearned over the perishing multitude, and over the leper, and the palsied man, and the maniac possessed with devils; the character which he showed when he said to the woman taken in adultery, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more;' which he showed when he said to the sinful Magdalene, who washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair, 'her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much;' the likeness which he showed in his very death agony upon the torturing cross, when he prayed for his murderers, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' This is the character which man may get in that dark deep.—To feel for all, and feel with all; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep; to understand people's trials, and make allowances for their temptations; to put oneself in their place, till we see with their eyes, and feel with their hearts, till we judge no man, and have hope for all; to be fair, and patient, and tender with every one we meet; to despise no one, despair of no one, because Christ despises none, and despairs of none; to look upon every one we meet with love, almost with pity, as people who either have been down into the deep of horror, or may go down into it any day; to see our own sins in other people's sins, and know that we might do what they do, and feel as they

feel, any moment, did God desert us; to give and forgive, to live and let live, even as Christ gives to us, and forgives us, and lives for us, and lets us live, in spite of all our sins.

And how shall we learn this? How shall the bottomless pit, if we fall into it, be but a pathway to the everlasting rock?

David tells us:

‘Out of the deep have I cried unto thee, O Lord.’

He cried to God.

Not to himself, his own learning, talents, wealth, prudence, to pull him out of that pit. Not to princes, nobles, and great men. Not to doctrines, books, church-goings. Not to the dearest friend he had on earth; for they had forsaken him, could not understand him, thought him perhaps beside himself. Not to his own good works, almsgivings, church-goings, church-buildings.

Not to his own experiences, faith’s assurances, frames or feelings. The matter was too terrible to be plastered over in that way, or in any way. He was face to face with God alone, in utter weakness, in utter nakedness of soul, He cried to God himself.

There was the lesson.

God took away from him all things, that he might have no one to cry to but God.

God took him up, and cast him down: and there he sat all alone, astonished and confounded, like Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, when she sat alone upon the parching rock. Like Rizpah, he watched the dead corpses of all his hopes and plans, all for which he had lived, and which made life worth having, withering

away there by his side. But it was told David what Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, had done. And it is told to one greater than David, even to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, what the poor soul does when it sits alone in its despair. Or rather it need not be told him; for he sees all, weeps over all, will comfort all: and it shall be to that poor soul as it was to poor deserted Hagar in the sandy desert, when the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast her child—the only thing she had left—under one of the shrubs and hurried away; for she said, ‘Let me not see the child die.’ And the angel of the Lord called to her out of heaven, saying, ‘The Lord hath heard the voice of the lad where he is;’ and God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

It shall be with that poor soul as it was with Moses, when he went up alone into the mount of God, and fasted forty days and forty nights amid the earthquake and the thunderstorm, and the rocks which melted before the Lord. And behold, when it was past, he talked face to face with God, as a man talketh with his friend, and his countenance shone with heavenly light, when he came down triumphant out of the mount of God.

So shall it be with every soul of man who, being in the deep, cries out of that deep to God, whether in bloody India or in peaceful England. For He with whom we have to do is not a tyrant, but a Father; not a taskmaster, but a Giver and a Redeemer. We may ask him freely, as David does, to consider our complaint, because he will consider it well, and understand it, and do it justice. He is not extreme to mark what is done

amiss, and therefore we can abide his judgments. There is mercy with him, and therefore it is worth while to fear him. He waits for us year after year, with patience which cannot tire; therefore it is but fair that we should wait a while for him. With him is plenteous redemption, and therefore redemption enough for us, and for those likewise whom we love. He will redeem us from all our sins: and what do we need more? He will make us perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. Let him then, if he must, make us perfect by sufferings. By sufferings Christ was made perfect; and what was the best path for Jesus Christ is surely good enough for us, even though it be a rough and a thorny one. Let us lie still beneath God's hand; for though his hand be heavy upon us, it is strong and safe beneath us too; and none can pluck us out of his hand, for in him we live and move and have our being; and though we go down into hell with David, with David we shall find God there, and find, with David, that he will not leave our souls in hell, or suffer his holy ones to see corruption. Yes; have faith in God. Nothing in thee which he has made shall see corruption; for it is a thought of God's, and no thought of his can perish.

Nothing shall be purged out of thee but thy disease; nothing shall be burnt out of thee but thy dross; and that in thee shall be saved, and live to all eternity, of which God said at the beginning, Let us make man in our own image. Yes. Have faith in God; and say to him once for all, 'Though thou slay me, yet will I love thee; for thou lovedst me in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world.'

SERMON IX

THE LOVE OF GOD

ITS OWN REWARD

Deut. xxx. 19, 20

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live; that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest cleave unto him, for he is thy life and the length of thy days, that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord God sware unto thy fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them.

I spoke to you last Sunday on this text. But there is something more in it, which I had not time to speak of then.

Moses here tells the Israelites what will happen to them if they keep God's law.

They will love God. That was to be their reward. They were to have other rewards beside. Beside loving God, it would be well with them and their children, and they would live long in the land which God had given them. But their first reward, their great reward, would be that they would love God.

If they obeyed God, they would have reason to love him.

Now we commonly put this differently.

We say, If you love God, you will obey him; which is quite true. But what Moses says is truer still, and deeper still. Moses says, If you obey God, you will love him.

Again we say, If you love God, God will reward you; which is true; though not always true in this life. But Moses says a truer and deeper thing. Moses says that loving God is our reward; that the greatest reward, the greatest blessing which a man can have, is this—that the man should love God. Now does this seem strange? It is not strange, nevertheless.

For there are two sorts of faith; and one must always, I sometimes think, come before the other.

The first is implicit faith—blind faith—the sort of faith a child has in what its parents tell it. A child, we know, believes its parents blindly, even though it does not understand what they tell it. It takes for granted that they are right.

The second is experimental faith—the faith which comes from experience and reason, when a man looks back upon his life, and on God's dealings with him; and then sees from experience what reason he has for trusting and loving God, who has helped him onward through so many chances and changes for so many years.

Now some people cry out against blind implicit faith, as if it was childish and unreasonable. But I cannot. I think every one learns to love his neighbour, very much as Moses told the Jews they would learn to love God; namely, by trusting them somewhat

blindly at first.

Is it not so? Is it not so always with young people, when they begin to be fond of each other? They trust each other, they do not know why, or how. Before they are married, they have little or no experience of each other; of each other's tempers and characters: and yet they trust each other, and say in their hearts, 'He can never be false to me;' and are ready to put their honour and fortunes into each other's hands, to live together for better for worse, till death them part. It is a blind faith in each other, that, and those who will may laugh at it, and call it the folly and rashness of youth. I do not believe that God laughs at it: that God calls it folly and rashness. It surely comes from God.

For there is something in each of them worth trusting, worth loving. True, they may be disappointed in each other; but they need not be. If they are true to themselves; if they will listen to the better voice within, and be true to their own better feelings, all will be well, and they will find after marriage that they did not do a rash and a foolish thing, when they gave up themselves to each other, and cast in their lot together blindly to live and die.

And then, after that first blind faith and love in each other which they had before marriage, will come, as the years roll by, a deeper, sounder faith and love from experience.—An experience of which I shall not talk here; for those who have not felt it for themselves would not know what I mean; and those who have felt it need no clumsy words of mine to describe it to them.

Now, my dear friends, this is one of the things by which

marriage is consecrated to an excellent mystery, as the Prayer-book says. This is one of the things in which marriage is a pattern and picture of the spiritual union which is between Christ and his Church.

First, as I said, comes blind faith. A young person, setting out in life, has little experience of God's love; he has little to make him sure that the way of life, and honour, and peace, is to obey God's laws. But he is told so. His Bible tells him so. Wiser and older people than he tell him so, and God himself tells him so. God himself makes up in the young person's heart a desire after goodness.

Then he takes it for granted blindly. He says to himself, I can but try. They tell me to taste and see whether the Lord is gracious. I will taste. They tell me that the way of his commandments is the way to make life worth loving, and to see good days. I will try. And so the years go by. The young person has grown middle-aged, old. He or she has been through many trials, many disappointments; perhaps more than one bitter loss.

But if they have held fast by God; if they have tried, however clumsily, to keep God's law, and walk in God's way, then there will have grown up in them a trust in God, and a love for God, deeper and broader far than any which they had in youth; a love grounded on experience. They can point back to so many blessings which the Lord gave them unexpectedly; to so many sorrows which the Lord gave them strength to bear, though they seemed at first sight past bearing; to so many disappointments

which seemed ill luck at the time, and yet which turned out good for them in the end. And so comes a deep, reasonable love to their Heavenly Father. Now they have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious. Now they can say, with the Samaritans, ‘Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but because we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’ And when sadness and affliction come on them, as it must come, they can look back, and so get strength to look forward. They can say with David, ‘I will go on in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention only of his righteousness. Oh my God, thou hast taught me from my youth up until now; hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, oh Lord, forsake me not, till I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to those whom I leave behind me.’

And so, by remembering what God *has* been to them, they can face what is coming. ‘They will not be afraid of evil tidings,’ as David says; ‘for their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.’

And when old age comes, and brings weakness and sickness, and low spirits, still they have comfort. They can say with David again, ‘I have been young, and now am old, but never saw I the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.’

Oh my dear friends, young people especially—there are many things which you may long for which you cannot have: much happiness which is *not* within your reach. But *this* you can have, if you will but long for it: this happiness *is* within your reach,

if you will but put out your hand and take it.—The everlasting unfailing comfort of loving God, and of knowing that God loves you. Oh choose that now at once. Choose God's ways which are pleasantness, and God's paths which are peace; and then in your old age, whether you become rich or poor, whether you are left alone, or go down to your grave in peace with children and grandchildren to close your eyes, you will still have the one great reward, the true reward, the everlasting reward which Moses promised the old Israelites. You will have reason to love God, who has carried you safe through life, and will carry you safe through death, and to say with all his saints and martyrs, 'Many things I know not; and many things I have lost: but this I know. —I know in whom I have believed; and this I cannot lose; even God himself, whose name is faithful and true.'

SERMON X

THE RACE OF LIFE

John i. 26

There standeth one among you whom ye know not.

This is a solemn text. It warns us, and yet it comforts us. It tells us that there is a person standing among us so great, that John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets, was not worthy to unloose his shoes' latchet.

Some of you know who he is. Some of you, perhaps, do not. If you know him, you will be glad to be reminded of him to-day. If you do not know him, I will tell you who he is.

Only bear this in mind, that whether you know him or not, he is standing among us. We have not driven him away, and cannot drive him away. Our not seeing him will not prevent his seeing us. He is always near us; ready, if we ask him, as the Collect bids us, to 'come among us, and with great might succour us.'

For, my friends, this is the meaning of the text, as far as it has to do with us. The noble Collect for to-day tells this, and explains to us what we are to think of the Epistle and the Gospel.

The Epistle tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is at hand, and

that therefore we are to fret about nothing, but make our requests known to him. The Gospel tells us that he stands among us. The Collect tells us what we are to do, because he is at hand, because he stands among us.

And what are we to do?

Recollect my friends, what John the Baptist said, according to St. Matthew, after the words in the text—‘He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.’

The Collect asks him to do that—the first half of it at least. To baptize us with the Holy Ghost, lest he should need to baptize us with fire.

For the Collect says, we have all a race to run. We have all a journey to make through life. We have all so to get through this world, that we shall inherit the world to come; so to pass through the things of time (as one of the Collects says) that we finally lose not the things eternal. God has given each of us our powers and character, marked out for each of us our path in life, set each of us our duty to do.

But how shall we make the proper use of our powers?

How shall we keep to our path in life?

How shall we do our duty faithfully?

In short, so as St. Paul puts it—How shall we run our race, so as not to lose, but to win it?

For the Collect says—and we ought to have found it out for ourselves before now—Our sins and wickedness hinder us sorely in running the race which is set before us.

Our sins and wickedness. The Collect speaks of these as two different things; and I believe rightly, for the New Testament speaks of them as two different things. Sin, in the New Testament, means strictly what we call “failings,” “defects” a missing the mark, a falling short; as it is written—All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, that is, of the likeness of a perfect man.¹

Thus, stupidity, laziness, cowardice, bad temper, greediness after pleasure—these are strictly speaking what the New Testament calls sins. Wickedness—iniquity—seem to be harder words, and to mean worse offences. They mean the evil things which a man does, not out of the weakness of his mortal nature, but out of his own wicked will, and what the Bible calls the naughtiness of his heart. So wickedness means, not merely open crimes which are punishable by the law, but all which comes out of a man’s own wilfulness and perverseness—injustice (which is the first meaning of iniquity), cunning, falsehood, covetousness, pride, self-conceit, tyranny, cruelty—these seem to be what the Scripture calls wickedness. Of course one cannot draw the line exactly, in any matters so puzzling as questions about our own souls must always be: but on the whole. I think you will find this rule not far wrong—

That all which comes from the weakness of a man’s soul, is

¹ Compare Rom. iii. 23 with I Cor. xi. 7. Let me entreat all young students to consider carefully and honestly the radical meaning of the words *αμαρτια* and *αμαρτανειν*. It will explain to them many seemingly dark passages of St. Paul, and perhaps deliver them from more than one really dark superstition.

sin: all which comes from abusing its strength, is wickedness.

All which drags a man down, and makes him more like a brute animal, is sin: all which puffs him up, and makes him more like a devil, is wickedness. It is as well to bear this in mind, because a man may have a great horror of sin, and be hard enough, and too hard upon poor sinners; and yet all the time he may be thoroughly, and to his heart's core, a wicked man. The Pharisees of old were so. So they are now. Take you care that you be not like to them. Keep clear of sin: but keep clear of wickedness likewise.

For, says the Collect, both will hinder you in your race: perhaps cause you to break down in it, and never reach the goal at all.

Sin will hinder you, by dragging you back.

Wickedness will hinder you, by putting you altogether out of the right road.

If a man be laden with sins; stupid, lazy, careless, over fond of pleasure;—much more, if he be given up to enjoying himself in bad ways, about which we all know too well—then he is like a man who starts in a race, weak, crippled, over-weighted, or not caring whether he wins or loses; and who therefore lags behind, or grows tired, or looks round, and wants to stop and amuse himself, instead of pushing on stoutly and bravely. And therefore St. Paul bids us lay aside every weight (that is every bad habit which makes us lazy and careless), and the sin which does so easily beset us, and run with patience our appointed race, looking

to Jesus, the author of our faith—who stands by to give us faith, confidence, courage to go on—Jesus, who has compassion on those who are ignorant, and out of the way by no wilfulness of their own; who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; who can help us, can deliver us, and who will do what he can, and do all he can.

He can and will strengthen us, freshen us, encourage us, inspirit us, by giving us his Holy Spirit, that we may have spirit and power to run our race, day by day, and tide by tide. And so, if he sees us weak and fainting over our work, he will baptize us with the Holy Ghost.

And yet there are times when he will baptize a sinner not only with the Holy Ghost, but with fire—I am still speaking, mind, of a sinner, not of a wicked man.

And when? When he sees the man sitting down by the roadside to play, with no intention of moving on. I do not say—if he sees the man sitting down to play at all. God forbid! How can a man run his life-long race—how can he even keep up for a week, a day, at doing his best at the full stretch of his power, without stopping to take breath? I cannot, God knows. If any man can—be it so. Some are stronger than others: but be sure of this; that God counts it no sin in a man to stop and take breath.

‘Press forward toward the mark of your high calling,’ St. Paul says: but he does not forbid a man to refresh and amuse himself harmlessly and rationally, from time to time, with all the pleasant things which God has put into this world. They do refresh us, and

they do amuse us, these pleasant things. And God made them, and put them here. Surely he put them here to refresh and amuse us. He did not surely put them here to trap us, and snare us, and tempt us not to run the very race which he himself has set before us? No, no, my friends. He made pleasant things to please us, amusing things to amuse us. Every good gift comes from him.

But if a man thinks of nothing but amusing himself, he is like a horse who stands still in the middle of a journey, and begins feeding. Let him do his day's journey, and feed afterwards; and so get strength for his next day's work. But if he will stand still, and feed; if he will forget that he has any work at all to do; then we shall punish him, to make him go on. And so will God do with us. He will strike us then; and sharply too. Much more, if a man gives himself up to sinful pleasure; if he gives himself up to a loose and profligate life, and, like many a young man, wastes his substance in riotous living, and devours his heavenly Father's gifts with harlots—then God will strike that man; and all the more sharply the more worth and power there is in the man.

The more God has given the man, the sharper will be God's stroke, if he deserves it.

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