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SERMON DCLXXXVI.

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GOD'S LOVE IN CHRIST'S MISSION.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

"He that believeth in him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

"But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."—JOHN iii. 14-21.

THESE verses, my fellow-citizens, are golden sentences. They are of more value than all the wise sayings of the ancients. In our sorrow-smitten and worrying world they are the unfailing fountains of peace and joy. They are the utterances of Him who came "to seek and save that which was lost;" who said "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The speaker is the Lord Jesus Christ. His

Owner of all things, and the Governor of all, your enemy, and provoke him to shut you out from his favor, whither will you go—where will you seek a refuge? You become an outcast, destitute and wretched indeed. Hell shall be your only portion—the only spot where you shall find a place.

Will you, then, sinner, not stop and contemplate this “great sight?” The King of Glory, the Author and Finisher of salvation for you, you see here approaching this rebellious province and entering on his self-denying, humiliating work. He comes to vanquish Satan, to destroy sin, and to save sinners like you. Will you not, then, hear his voice, accept his offering, and receive him for *your* Saviour? He knocks at the door of your heart, will you not arise and let him in?

SERMON DCLXXXVIII.

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A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

“Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God.”—Amos iv. 12.

THE nation of Israel still persisted in rebellion and impenitence, notwithstanding the repeated warnings which God had given them, and the judgments he had already inflicted upon them. They must, therefore, expect more decisive marks of divine indignation against them for their sins. God was about to meet them, and in incensed wrath; and he warns them to prepare for an event so tremendous. God will show himself the adversary of the wicked; and will make them feel that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” He is the heart-searching and omniscient Judge of all men; the Creator of the mountains; the sovereign Disposer of the winds and of the storms; the high Arbitrer of every man’s prosperity and adversity; and he turneth the bright morning of success and triumph into the dark night of adversity, sorrow, and deep despair.

To this view of God, the prophet calls the people in the words immediately following our text. But passing by the circumstances of the Israelites, upon whom God was about to take vengeance by means of the Assyrian armies, let us improve the warning in our text suitably to the present very impressive occasion.

I. We shall show the *certainty* of a future judgment; where we all must meet God.

II. We shall aim to show what each one must now do, that we may then meet him with comfort and peace.

I. At death, God passes a particular judgment upon every man. Every soul, at death, passes, according to the decision of the Almighty Judge, immediately either into Paradise, "and when absent from the body is present with the Lord," or is in hell, waked up in the misery of the lost. But at the Resurrection—at the last day—there will be a general judgment; and "they that have done good, shall come forth to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation." *This will be a most awful day.*

"A day of wrath, a dreadful day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away;
When shrivelling like a parched scroll,
The flaming heavens together roll.
And louder yet, and yet more dread,
Swells the high trump that wakes the dead."

That a time is approaching when God will reward the good and punish the wicked—the terrors and fears which haunt the guilty conscience, clearly indicate. This testimony is felt by all men, and all are possessed of this apprehension by the moral constitution which God has given them, and they cannot free themselves from it. The heathen, as is proved by their religious history, were fully possessed of this peculiar apprehension. What but the certain dread of meeting God, in terrible judgment, filled the breast of Belshazzar with so much consternation when he beheld the ominous fingers which wrote, in mysterious characters, his doom, upon the wall of his banqueting-room. And why did Felix, the Roman governor, tremble when his prisoner reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come? It was the irresistible conviction that he should meet his injured and offended Creator in solemn judgment. We, therefore, have the proof in our consciences that we must each of us stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to answer for the deeds done in the body.

There is another strong proof of the certainty of a future judgment derived from the perfections of God. Although sin and transgression often make the lot of the sinner hard in this life; yet this world cannot be the place of retribution. Here we often see wickedness and the basest deceit and hypocrisy for a time triumphant; whilst the upright, pious, and devoted servants of God are often cruelly oppressed. Now, if God reigns over men, and be just at the same time; and if the scriptural declaration be true, "that the Judge of all the earth will do right;" and if he be a God of immutable holiness, justice, goodness, and truth—he will—he must—necessarily punish the bad and reward the good.

But, not to mention other cogent reasons which might be named—such as our relation to him as our Creator, and our absolute dependence on him as such, and his being the moral Governor and Lawgiver of us his rational creatures, to whom we are accountable and must answer for all our words and deeds—we will now refer you to the Holy Scriptures, in which this awful but very useful doctrine is fully taught, in plain and express terms, both in the Old Testament and the New. Jude quotes a prophecy of Enoch: "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Abra-

ham gives it, as the character of Jehovah, that as Judge of all the earth, he will do right. But if this same awful truth is taught, by different writers of the Old Testament ; it is still more clearly and abundantly in the New by our divine Lord and his inspired apostles.

And what can equal, in awful grandeur, the different separate descriptions of this scene which are given to us in this part of the Sacred Volume. "The Judge shall come in the clouds of heaven. Every eye shall see him ; at his presence, the heavens and the earth shall flee away, and there shall no place be found for them." As indications of the approach of the final conflagration, it may be, low and terribly mysterious sounds will be heard, awakening the suspicion that some dreadful hour is at hand. Vivid lightnings stand for a time in the heavens, quivering and trembling, and then dart fearfully across the skies. The mysterious sounds first heard continue to come, louder and heavier, until they swell into the vast detonations of mighty earthquakes and the awful crash of worlds coming in collision with worlds. As when Vesuvius and Etna, in the trembling of their mountains and convulsions, give unmistakable indications of their terrible and destructive eruptions ; the affrighted inhabitants of the two Sicilies vainly run to and fro to find a shelter from the storms of melted lava that threaten universal ruin. So when the earth trembles and the mountains shake from the convulsions of an expiring universe, its dismayed inhabitants will more vainly seek a covert from the last great tempest of Jehovah's destructive power. All of the race of Adam, of every age, shall feel and know that the last great day is come. Then shall the universe of intelligent beings discern between the righteous and the wicked ; for the righteous shall ascend to glory, to honor, and immortal life in heaven ; whilst the wicked sink down to shame and contempt and everlasting wailings in hell. If any are disposed to ask, is there any way to escape from so awful a trial, or to avoid the meeting of God in judgment ? We answer, *No*. How, how can any escape ? Can the sinner flee from the government of God, and place himself under that of another ? Can he escape the vigilance of Omniscience ? or get beyond the reach of Omnipotence ? Or can man become independent of his God, and set him at defiance ? If these things are impossible, then every one of us must give an account of himself to God. And it is immutably true, that God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or bad. The great difficulty here does not lie in the want of proof that we all must meet God in judgment ; but in the want of the conviction of the fact. If men believed that they must meet God at death and in judgment, would they live as, alas ! multitudes do, both in and out of the visible church ? Who that firmly believes that he shall shortly meet God in judgment, would act the hypocrite towards God or deceitfully and falsely towards man ? Could any one dare interpose in the sacred interests of Christ's kingdom, who is himself conscious that he does not even keep up the forms of religion ? if he indeed believes that God says to such, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. These things hast thou done ; and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself ; but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes. Now,

consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." How hard is it to bring men to believe that they shall very shortly give an account of themselves in the final judgment? even whilst the earth itself, as it were, groans under the burden of their sins. But our unbelief and want of conviction of this awful truth will not retard the day of our meeting with God, or disannul the fixed decree of Heaven appointing that men shall once die, and after that be judged. Fix it, therefore, in your hearts, that you must all very shortly meet God in judgment.

II. As to the preparation necessary to meet God with comfort and peace, we proceed to remark, that it does not consist "in works of righteousness that we have done," however valuable they may be to society. Alas! in the sight of an infinitely holy God, all our righteousness is but "filthy rags." By the deeds of the law, no flesh living can be justified in his sight, neither can we be prepared by any outward acts of religion, however zealously performed, without real inward holiness of heart, and without that love to God and man which constitute the essence of true religion. But the very important question arises, how is depraved and guilty man to obtain this holiness of heart? How? We give the same answer to you, and we are not authorized to give a different one, which Paul and Silas gave to the awakened and inquiring jailor—"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." We must first, and last, and always, and only meet God in Christ, who is the Mediator between God and man. For God out of Christ, or aside from Christ, is "a consuming fire." We never can find pardon and salvation until we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our peace. In him we have righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Christ himself invites the weary and the heavy-laden unto him for rest. The Father is well-pleased in his Son, and will not reject the soul that trusts in him, and forsakes all to follow him. Here we find a righteousness that is complete, and that will justify us before God. In him we find the most powerful motives to hate and forsake sin. It is the cross of Christ that makes the heart to feel indifferent to this world, and renders its riches, its honors, and its pleasures comparative trifles, that are without any substantial value. Christ breaks the fetters of sin, and bestows upon the emancipated and renewed soul the liberty of the sons of God.

To faith in Christ, we must add repentance of our sins, and works meet for repentance, if we would obtain the necessary preparation. This is a duty, not less enjoined by reason than revelation, when we sin against God or man. For nothing is more just and reasonable than to be sorry for the wrongs we have done, and so change our conduct as to make all the reparation for them that we can. But that our repentance would be available for us, and be accepted of God, we only can know from the Gospel. Repentance is the forsaking of sin, the sorrow and regret for our guilt, and a change of conduct in the fixed purpose never to be guilty again.

Furthermore, let it be understood that a disposition to obey all the commandments of God, is involved in the preparation mentioned in our text. The very essence, indeed, of religion is, the spirit of obedience to Christ. A partial compliance with some of the duties of religion, whilst

others equally important are neglected, is not what we mean as sufficient here. Every duty must be attended to, in its place and at the proper time. Nor will it do to think, that to be punctual and faithful in some duties will make up or atone for the omission of others equally important. We cannot thus compound matters with God. Nor will it answer to expect that performing the common duties of morality will expiate for the want of piety towards God; or that a superabundance of zeal, in some things pertaining to God and religion, will compensate for the violation of mercy and truth and righteousness toward men. David said, "then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all of thy commandments."

If we would prepare to meet God in peace and comfort when we shall see him on the throne of final judgment; we must often meet with him in prayer whilst he occupies the mercy-seat. For your benefit, to hear your petitions, he is now on this mercy-seat. But he will soon vacate this seat for the throne of the Judge. Now, therefore, is the time to petition, to pray, to seek. Sad, indeed, is the state, and gloomy are the future prospects of those who seldom or never pray. And they pray not because they have never felt their sinfulness and poverty. How can they, who are strangers to private prayer, or who, if they have families, have erected no altar of prayer to the God of Heaven; who offer to him no sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, and supplicate him for no mercy, be prepared to meet God, except with terror and dismay?

But they who have made a covenant with God by prayer; who have made supplication to him with strong crying and tears; who have often received gracious answers from him, and found him a present and prompt help in times of trouble; and to whom, in his most gracious condescension, he has granted the privilege of freely expressing to him all that their hearts feel or desire in times of distress or affliction; have, as it were, contracted an intimacy with God, and shall meet him not only with comfort and peace, but through the riches of his grace shall enter heaven itself, with songs and shouting and everlasting joy upon their heads.

Solemn and impressive, indeed, are the circumstances under which we are now assembled. One younger, perhaps, than four-fifths of this large assembly, has been called from time to eternity. One of *us*. One that has lived among us from her birth until her death. One that we knew. One that we dearly loved. One that was amiable, modest, quiet, and good, and as such very highly appreciated by her numerous acquaintances and friends. She is not *here*. She has gone to meet her God, we believe, in much peace of mind. We indulge the confident hope, that by the mercy and grace of God she was prepared for the event. During her sickness, the state of her mind was uniformly calm and quiet. Death came without any of its usual terrors. When she was dying, she distinctly and emphatically remarked, "What a beautiful morning is *this*—what a beautiful morning!" Sweet child! it was, indeed, a beautiful morning, when the glorious dawn of immortal life came over thy pure and precious soul. It was "a beautiful morning," when thy liberated spirit triumphantly and happily ascended to the God who gave it. When the night of death passed away, and thy favored eyes were graciously permitted to see the day-break of a bright and endless being, no wonder, dear sister, thou didst, in the raptures of thy soul, exclaim, "What a beautiful morning!"

Yes. It was a beautiful, glorious morning, when sustained and soothed by an unflinching trust in the Redeemer, your spirit triumphed over the terrors of death, and ascended on high to dwell with the just and the good. It was a beautiful morning, thou sweet, rapt seraph; it was a beautiful morning.

Friends of the deceased, as it is your privilege to indulge the hope of her present happiness, your duty will lead you to bow submissively to Him whose grace is sufficient to sustain you in this great trial. God alone can effectually help in distress. The sympathies of friends, however tender, cannot reach your case in such circumstances; but your heavenly Parent can pour into your hearts the wine and the oil of his divine consolation. Look out of yourselves. Look to the *future*. Look upward. Look to God. And let us not forget that all of us very soon must follow her.

“As the long train of ages glide away, the sons of men,
The youth in full green spring, and we who go
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,
The bowed with age, the infant in the smiles
And beauty of its innocent age, cut off,
Shall, one by one, be gathered to *her* side.”

HYMN.

The chariot! the chariot! its wheels roll in fire,
As the Lord cometh down in the pomp of his ire;
Lo, self-moving, it drives on its pathway of cloud,
And the heavens with the burden of Godhead are bowed.

The glory! the glory! around him are poured,
Mighty hosts of the angels that wait on the Lord:
And the glorified saints and the martyrs are there,
And there all who the palm-wreaths of victory wear.

The trumpet! the trumpet! the dead have all heard;
Lo, the depths of the stone-covered charnel are stirred!
From sea, from the earth, from the south, from the north,
All the vast generation of man are come forth.

The judgment! the judgment! the thrones are all set,
Where the Lamb and the white-vested elders are met:
There all flesh is at once in the sight of the Lord,
And the doom of eternity hangs on his word.

O mercy! O mercy! look down from above,
Great Creator, on us, thy sad children, with love;
When beneath to their darkness the wicked are driven,
May our justified souls find a welcome in heaven.

CHRISTIAN LYRE.