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COVENANT RENOVATION

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"They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD, in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten." Jer. 50: 5.

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THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE SHOULD ENGAGE IN THE ACT OF COVENANTING.

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WHEN the great French preacher, Massillon, was about to pronounce the funeral discourse of Louis XIV., he stood for a moment, surveying in silence the vast assembly before him and the emblems of mourning with which he was surrounded ; and then, as if overwhelmed with a sense of the indescribable nothingness of man “at his best estate,” broke the solemn stillness with these words, “God alone is great.”

Standing in this presence, amid the hallowed associations of this hour, and on the very threshold of the solemn service in which we are presently to engage, I feel that silent meditation would be more fitting than words, and that at best I can but speak to you with stammering tongue.

We are here, not to lay God under any new or additional obligation, but to devote ourselves by a renewed act of self-consecration to his service, and to receive for ourselves and for our children the blessings which are treasured up in that everlasting covenant of grace, which is ordered in all things and sure. In that eternal arrangement between the Father and the Son, God promises to be our God, to stand to us in a very intimate and endearing relation, and to bestow upon us all necessary and gracious blessings. We have but to accept the terms, to hear him saying to us, “I will betroth thee

unto me for ever ; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment and in loving kindness and in mercies," "Thy Maker is thine husband ; the Lord of Hosts is his name ; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel," "For all things are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's," and, reaching out the hand of faith, receive out of that fulness that dwells according to the good pleasure of the Father in Christ, and appropriate to ourselves all promised blessings from the infinite riches of his grace.

This approach to the presence of God must be made in the spirit of deep humiliation. When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, the seraphim veiling their faces before him, and heard their solemn "Trisagion," "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts ; the whole earth is full of his glory," we hear him crying, "Wo is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." If he, the rapt Isaiah, "whose hallowed lips were touched with fire," was overwhelmed with a sense of his own unworthiness, much more may we inquire, "Who can stand before so holy a Lord God ?" It becomes us to say with Ezra, "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God ; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." When Moses saw the bush burning with fire but not consumed, he heard the voice of God, "Draw not nigh hither ; put off thy shoes from off thy feet ; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." We re-

member that the bush burning with fire but not consumed, was the emblem of the church of our fathers. Three hundred years have passed since, with hands lifted up to God, they swore to the same principles to which we give our adherence to-day. "*Nec tamen consumebatur.*" Do we not also hear from out this flame of fire, this bush yet unconsumed, the voice of God, in tones solemn as those which fell upon the ears of the son of Amram, in the desert, "*The place whereon thou standest is holy ground?*" Surely we all feel that this is the most important and solemn hour of our lives. We have been at the communion table, that holy place, overshadowed with the wings of the cherubim, where God meets with his people, communes with them and blesses them. We have been in the chamber of death, and as the soul of the righteous departing from the earthly house went to be forever with the Lord, a solemn awe has fallen upon the spirit, as we felt that Jehovah with his chariots of salvation was passing by. We have mingled, doubtless, in many solemn scenes of which we have said surely "God is in this place." But now, we draw nearer to him than we have ever done before. May we so approach him that with holy Jacob, after his wrestling with the angel, we may inscribe upon this place PENIEL, and say with him, "For I have seen God face to face."

We must enter into this our covenant and oath in the spirit of entire self-consecration to the service of Christ. In the days of the pious Asa, when God had wrought a great deliverance for his people, they renewed their covenant, and it is said of that transaction, "And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with *all their*

heart, and sought him with *their whole desire*." In laying hold of God's covenant, we not only take him for our God, but we pledge ourselves to be his people, that "we will live no longer to ourselves, to Satan, to sin or the world, but for him alone, that, all other gods being rejected, we will believe, worship and serve him alone; that we will devote ourselves, soul and body, to him as his temples and spiritual sacrifices: our *mind* his to know him, our will to worship him, our *affections* to love him, our *eyes* to behold the wonders of his power, our *ears* to hear his voice, our *tongues* to celebrate his praise, our *hands* to do his work, and in fine, every member as an instrument of righteousness to God." Let us hear the exhortation of the apostle, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Let no one take the oath of God who hath not vowed to consecrate himself to God and to the church, with his whole heart and strength and mind. "This day the Lord thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments; thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart and with all thy soul." May the declaration of the inspired apostle, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself;" "Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's," come home with power to our hearts, and may we be enabled to say, as for us and our house we will serve the Lord.

We must earnestly seek for the divine Spirit to enable us to be faithful to our covenant obligations. "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest

vow and not pay." "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." We pledge ourselves to-day to some principles which we hold in common with all the people of God of every name, and also to others which we esteem of equal importance, but to which we are at present the only witnesses. That these principles will eventually triumph we are confident, but until that day come we must make our account to meet with more or less of opposition and reproach. Let us beware of the example of the perfidious sons of Ephraim, who, lacking neither bows nor arrows, turned back, faint-hearted, in the day of battle. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

We recall the scene in Grey-friar's churchyard, when the "National Covenant" was sworn by our fathers. "The intense emotions of many became irrepressible. Some wept aloud ; some burst into a shout of exultation ; some after their names added the words *till death* ; and some, opening a vein, subscribed with their own warm blood." The words "till death," were no empty boast. Soon the fires of persecution were kindled, and blood flowed like water ; on battle fields, on scaffolds, in dungeons, and at the stake, many sealed their fidelity to their covenant engagements with their lives. We may not be called to pass through such scenes as those which witnessed the fidelity of our martyred fathers. But we shall not accomplish our testimony without meeting bitter and determined opposition. We may expect to be severely tried. We must set our faces like a flint ; we must keep the eye of faith steadfastly fixed upon Him "who, for

the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame ;” upon the great cloud of witnesses, who have gone before us ; upon the unfading crown and the unending kingdom. “ To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

Let us seek for that strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that overcomes the world and secures the victory against every enemy. When covenants were made under the Old Testament, the victim was divided, the parties to the engagement passed between the parts, while the blood of the victim was sprinkled upon them in token of their fidelity to their obligations. That blood typified the blood of Christ, by which alone we have boldness to approach to God in any act of solemn worship. Through faith in Christ we become heirs of the blessings of the covenant of grace, and, therefore, we should especially remember that in this act without faith it is impossible to please God. We come “ to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

How long have we prayed and waited for the promise of the Spirit to be fulfilled ! Some communications of God’s grace we have from time to time received ; some showers have fallen upon us, but we have not enjoyed the outpouring of the Spirit in such fullness and efficacy as we have desired. We have not received the great rain of his strength. The heavens above us have been iron, and the earth brass. The seed has been sown, but the harvest has not been gathered. Our neglect of the duty which we now essay in God’s great and holy name may

be the cause. At all events let us now lift up our prayer to God that he would pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. May we not be permitted to believe that the promise of the Holy Ghost is now to be fulfilled, that our covenant God will open the windows of heaven and pour upon us a blessing until there shall not be room to receive? "Awake, O north wind ; and come thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

From this moment let us endeavor to strengthen the bonds of brotherly love. Union in this great act must increase mutual confidence and affection. All wrath, and malice, and envy, and evil speaking must cease.

Permit me to exhort you in the words of the great apostle, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honor preferring one another." Do I not express both the conviction and resolution of all, when I say, that from this time we shall be more united than we have ever been heretofore ; that now hand will grasp hand with renewed zeal and sincerity, and that henceforth, like a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots, we will go forward in the work of the Lord ?

We pledge ourselves in our bond that no effort shall be spared to make our beloved country a kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. The old blue banner of the covenant which our fathers unfurled to the battle and the breeze, bore for its inscription, "For Christ's Crown and Covenant." Shortly after the disruption of the established church the eloquent Guthrie said, "This storm has blown out the old banner until we read 'For Christ's Crown.' Let it blow a little longer and a little stronger,

and we shall read the entire motto, 'For Christ's Crown and Covenant.' " That prayer, alas ! is yet unfulfilled in the land of our covenant fathers. But here, to-day, we bind ourselves to endeavor to hasten the time when the meteor flag of our country, the starry emblem of its power, shall float over a land in covenant with God, recognizing his Son and owning allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ. And may God hasten it in his time. And now, dear brethren, let us with united hearts, with sincerity of purpose, with fervent prayer to the God of all grace to make us perfect, stablish, strengthen and settle us, and with our hearts lifted up with our hands to God in the heavens, carry out our long-cherished and deliberate purpose to "join ourselves to the Lord in a *perpetual* covenant that shall not be forgotten."