

THE PRESBYTERIAN PREACHER.

Vol. III.

PITTSBURGH, JULY, 1834.

No. 2.

SERMON XXIX.

BY HENRY R. WEED,
OF WHEELING, VIRGINIA.

EXCELLENCE OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

ILLUSTRATED IN THEIR UNCORRUPTED PRESERVATION, IN THE
NATURE OF THEIR CONTENTS, AND IN THE CHARACTER OF
THEIR INFLUENCE.

PSALM 119:39.—*Thy judgments are good.*

THE original of this psalm is one of the curiosities of Hebrew literature. It belongs to that small class of sacred poetry which is denominated *alphabetical* or *acrostic*. It consists of twenty-two stanzas, corresponding with the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet and arranged in alphabetical order. Each stanza contains eight lines, and each line in the same stanza begins with the same letter. Though the author's name is not prefixed, this psalm is generally ascribed to the inspiration of the royal psalmist of Israel. David is supposed to have written it in the different vicissitudes of his eventful life, and afterwards to have arranged the detached parts in their present order, and given them an acrostic form for the aid of the reader's memory. But however this may be, it is no way doubtful to the pious mind, accustomed to an attentive perusal of this portion of sacred writ, that the author has here furnished a precious treasury of truth, adapted to the Christian's experience in all the variety of the circumstances of his life. If there be any one design, rather than another, apparent throughout the whole, it seems to be to exhibit the practical excellency of the word of God; and though only a small part of what is now comprised in the sacred canon was then written, the commendations here found are certainly not less applicable to the entire bible. There are at least ten different titles here applied to the scriptures; and it is another curious fact respecting this psalm, that some one of these is introduced into almost every verse. Sometimes each of these different terms appears to have its own peculiar signification, and sometimes they appear to be used promiscuously to avoid tautology, or to suit the metrical arrangement.

In our text, we understand the term *judgments* as a general title of the word of God. In discoursing on the passage, we shall consider

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BY HENRY R. WEED,
OF WHEELING, VA.

VISION OF THE LAMB.

A SACRAMENTAL DISCOURSE.

REV. 5:6. *And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb, as it had been slain.*

THIS is a part of John's vision, introductory to his prophecies recorded in the subsequent chapters. As he looked up into heaven, a glorious scene was presented to his view. A door was opened in heaven; and as he looked within, he saw the throne of the eternal King; and he that sat upon the throne was in appearance "like a jasper, and a sardine stone; and there was a rain-bow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." The resplendent and transparent jasper is supposed to represent the perfect purity and unsullied holiness of the divine nature—the sardine stone, which is of a *red* color, the avenging justice of God—and the rain-bow his covenant mercy. He, moreover, saw, in orderly arrangement, round about the throne, four living creatures, and four and twenty elders, clothed in white raiment, and wearing crowns of gold. These are supposed to be the representatives of the ministers and church of the living God. And besides many other symbolical exhibitions of the invisible world, he beheld, with admiration, "in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts (or *living creatures*, as it might be translated), and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns," (well known emblems of power,) "and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God," (i. e. the manifold influences of the Spirit,) "sent forth into all the earth."

I need hardly tell you, my brethren, that by the Lamb in the vision, is meant the Lord Jesus Christ in his mediatorial character. He is often exhibited in the sacred writings under this figure; and according to its proper import, is a most appropriate object of our contemplation, when we are thus assembled to celebrate the sacrifice he made for our sins. Let us, then, in the

First place, inquire what the import of this figure is: why is the Saviour represented as a *Lamb*? The title may denote, 1. His *meekness*. This is, even to a proverb, a distinguishing characteristic of the Lamb. And who that has read the history that the evangelists have given of the Son of man, can have failed to observe how remarkably it was exemplified in his life. What indignities—what insults—what taunts and scoffs, were cast upon him! But no angry passion ever ruffled his bosom—no malignant revenge ever marked an action of his life. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." To Zion, it was proclaimed, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, *meek* and lowly." And when he invites the weary and heavy-laden to him for rest, he encourages their approach by the assurance that he is "*meek* and lowly in heart."

Again: a lamb is an established emblem of *innocence*. What, then, could be more suitable to express the immaculate character of the Redeemer? Though he took not upon him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, though "the Word was made *flesh*, and dwelt among us," though he was made of a woman, and thus became our kinsman, our brother; yet such was the peculiarity of his generation that no stain of human depravity was attached to his person. Though he became subject, in common with us, to infirmities, temptations, and trials; yet was he without sin. The inspired testimony concerning him is, "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." The untarnished purity of his character was continually inculcated on the minds of ancient believers, not only by the use of lambs in their typical sacrifices, but also by the care which they were required to exercise in choosing those that were without spot or blemish.

We may remark, *further*, that the figure under which our Lord is represented in the text, is adapted to remind us of his *patience*. How various and severe were the sufferings which he endured, when as the man of sorrows he tabernacled among us! but what an *example of patience* did he leave for those that should come after! "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted; yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Amidst all the reproaches and persecutions of his benevolent life, and even amidst all the torture and anguish of his bloody death, he never uttered an angry or a murmuring word. The meekness, innocence, gentleness, and patience of the Lamb were not more clearly inculcated by his *precepts*, than they were exemplified in his *practice*. As the incarnate Son of God, he united all the amiable virtues of sinless humanity, to all the glorious attributes of essential divinity.

But this emblematical title, so often applied to Christ, was much more significant to a Jewish ear, than it ordinarily is to our ears. Lambs were continually exhibited before their eyes in their expiatory sacrifices, and hence became associated with all their ideas of acceptance with God. It was, therefore, with special reference to this fact, and the divine appointment on which it was founded, that the sacred writers represented the Savior under the figure employed in our text. They well knew that every sacrifice that was offered, that every lamb that was slain, that every victim that smoked on the altars of their religion, and that every priest who ministered at their temple, was a type of Christ, who "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," by his blood to purge our "consciences from dead works to serve the living God." Christ was the great antitype, to which they all referred. In his death the meaning of all previous victims was explained and fulfilled. And hence, as a

Second topic of consideration, I would remark, that the text points us not only to the lamb-like qualities that the Redeemer exhibited in his personal character, but also to the *SACRIFICE FOR SIN* that he made in his mediatorial office. It points us to his expiatory sufferings and death. "I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne—stood a *Lamb, as it had been slain*." Viewing him simply in the form of a lamb, the inspired revelator might have recognized him as his once living, and ever beloved Lord; but when he further saw that he bore the marks of death—"the scars of mortal wounds"—that there were the

prints of the nails and of the spear, he could not for a moment doubt that this was he, whose bloody agony he had once witnessed in the garden of Gethsemane—he, whom he had seen hanging on the accursed tree—the bleeding, dying victim of Calvary as the grand object shadowed forth by all the Mosaic rites—"the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"—"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" O, what a flood of emotions must have arisen in the bosom of this beloved disciple, while thus contemplating the scene that was disclosed to his view—and with what a freshness and affecting tenderness would the whole history of his Lord's past sufferings now press on his recollection! And can we, my brethren,—though not favored with the same sensible representation with which John was,—yet can we contemplate with indifference the record he has here given us of what he saw, especially when our contemplations are aided and strengthened by these affecting memorials of his body and blood? O, can our hearts be cold, and our devotions be formal, while we encompass this table, and, through the medium of the inspired testimony and of these sacramental symbols, look on the "Lamb that was slain!" You will observe, it is not merely said, that *he died*. We do, indeed, in one view of the subject so speak; but such an expression, falls short of a full exhibition of the facts in the case. "He died not the common death of all men, nor was he visited after the visitation of all men." It is said that "*he was slain*," and there is force in the expression. He died a violent death, and it is so described on the sacred page, whether you consider the agency of God or man.

But why did the Prince of life thus ignominiously die? why was the Lamb of God thus slain? He, who could instantly have called more than twelve legions of angels to the defence of his life; *He*, who had the power to lay down his life and to take it again—*He*, who "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," was not surely overpowered in conflict with his foes: his life was not surely wrested from him contrary to his will. No, my hearers. He came into the world designing to suffer the reproaches and cruelties of men, and to endure the wrath of God; designing to give himself to the shame and the pain that were due to our transgression; designing to resign himself as a lamb to the slaughter, that he might expiate the guilt that we had contracted, and avert the wrath that we had incurred. He was slain, as the only adequate and effectual propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. Of no avail, in themselves considered, were the offerings under the law. It is not possible, saith the apostle, that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins; but, adds he, Christ appeared once in the end of the world, (that is, at the close of the Jewish economy) to *put away sin* by the *sacrifice of himself*. But now, it may be asked, did he *put away sin* by the sacrifice of himself? What are we to understand by this expression? As it is in allusion to the ancient sacrifices, that he is denominated a Lamb, *they* will afford the correct illustration of the phrase. On turning, then, to the typical ceremonies of the law, we find on this subject, that when an individual offered a sacrifice of atonement for his offences, he was required to lay his hands on the head of the victim before it was slain, confessing over it his sins to signify a transfer of them to the innocent animal; and that the victim, then slain, was considered as dying in his stead and for his sins. Examine attentively the Levitical laws, and I think you cannot fail of

finding a clear exhibition of the doctrines of *substitution*, *imputation*, and *vicarious* suffering; and these are doctrines which, I conceive, are implied in our text. The Lord Jesus, as the Lamb slain, was the legal *substitute* of his people, their sins were *imputed* to him, and by being sacrificed in their stead, he expiated their guilt—took away their sins. He “who knew no sin”—who had no sin of his own—became a sin-offering for us—and “his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” The Lamb that was slain, was *slain for us*. Here, my christian brethren, we will fix our faith—here we will venture our all—here we will encourage our hearts in hope—here, in view of the Lamb that was slain, will we lift up our heads in triumph.

3. The text suggests *another topic*, to which we must briefly advert: I mean *the Redeemer's appearance and intercession* in heaven. His official work in achieving the redemption of his people, was not consummated when his sufferings were ended,—“He died for our sins, and *rose again* for our justification”—“and henceforth *ever liveth to make intercession* for us.” John saw him, not only as bearing the marks of death, as a lamb *that had been slain*, but as again alive and *standing*. John in another vision heard him say, “I am the first, and the last,—I am he that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore.” The reproaches and suffering to which he was subject on earth, had now ceased, and he again shared the glory that he had with the Father before the world was.

It is indeed the babe of Bethlehem, and man of sorrows—but O how changed! Instead of the manger and the cross, he now has a throne, and a crown; yea, the throne of God and the crown of the universe. Instead of the cry, “*Away with him, crucify him,*” is now heard the shout of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders—(and the number of them is ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands)—saying, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”

But does he still remember us, amidst the splendors of this scene, and the worship of adoring throngs? Yes, my brethren. Unlike the little creatures of earth, who, in their advancement to wealth, or honor, are swelled into an imaginary self-importance, in which they forget the companions of their former condition. Jesus, remembers his humble disciples, who are yet in the flesh, following the lowly path which he once trod. He is not ashamed of the ignominy of the cross. He exhibits the marks of his former abasement before the throne of God, and amidst the myriads by which he is surrounded. He appears as our advocate with the Father, pleading our cause and presenting the scars in his hands, his feet and his side, as a standing *memorial* of the sacrifice he once made for our sins. This, is the *great argument* by which he urges our acceptance with God. And can such an Intercessor and such an argument, be disregarded! Can *they* be unavailing! Must not the Father be moved by the marks of death on the person of his beloved Son? O, then, let us draw near with humble boldness, notwithstanding all the number and the enormity of our sins, confidently believing that “he is able to *save to the uttermost*” all “that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to *make intercession* for us.”

Amen.