

## **Divine Omnipotence, or Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day  
Afternoon, July 4, 1869

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Gen. 18:14

The doubts and fears to which God's people are subject are very different from the obstinate, persistent unbelief of the ungodly. The very term indeed itself shows that there is a vital and radical difference between them, as the common expression "doubts and fears" is never applied to the wilful, obstinate unbelief of the wicked, but to the want of faith, or rather of the assurance of faith, in the righteous. Thus, though the word "doubt" implies distrust and unbelief, yet it is not so much a doubt of the truth of God's word, or of the way of salvation by free and sovereign grace, as a doubt of personal interest in the love and blood of Christ; and the very expression "fear" implies a desire to be right in the sight of God, and a dread of being wrong, neither of which marks is to be found in wilful and obstinate unbelievers. I do not, however, say that doubts and fears do not partake of sin; for they spring from an evil heart of unbelief, and, therefore, there is a stain of sin attaching to them, as we see evidently marked both in the Scriptures, and in the judgment which an enlightened conscience passes upon them. Who can deny, for instance, that the doubts of Abraham, which he manifested when twice he denied that Sarah was his wife, were in themselves sinful? And we know the judgment that Hart passes on his own doubts, where he says:

"I groan, and grieve, and cry, and call  
On Jesus for relief;  
But, that delayed, to doubting fall,

Of all my sins the chief."

From these testimonies from Scripture and experience we may safely conclude that doubts and fears do in themselves partake of the nature of sin. Yet, if we look at the way in which the Lord dealt with the doubts and fears of his people in the days of his flesh, we shall find that he dealt with them very differently from the way in which he dealt with the fixed, determined, wilful incredulity and infidelity of obstinate unbelievers. Thus, when, at the bidding of his gracious Master, Peter walked upon the water, as long as he looked to the Lord by faith he could step boldly and fearlessly on; but when "he saw the wind boisterous he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." But observe how the Lord dealt with him and with this fit of unbelief. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31.) Do we not see from this instance how tenderly and gently our gracious Lord reproved his unbelief, dealing with it more as an infirmity than condemning it as positive sin? Look again at the case of Thomas, who seemed for a time so shut up in unbelief, that he positively declared nothing could convince him that the Lord had risen from the dead, unless he could actually see in his hands the print of the nails, put his finger into them, and thrust his hand into Jesus' side. How strongly must unbelief have wrought in him that he should require such a test. And yet how tenderly and graciously did the Lord deal with him, when eight days after, Thomas being then present, Jesus stood again in their midst. "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands: and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." (John 20:27.) So when the unbelief of Thomas melted as snow before the gracious presence and gentle reproof of his risen Lord, and he answered and said unto

him, "My Lord and my God," how kindly and yet how faithfully did our Lord reprove his unbelief: "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29.) I may perhaps call Thomas an unbelieving believer. That he was a believer, is evident, both as being a chosen disciple, and as consorting with the rest of the disciples after the resurrection; but that he could not and did not believe that Christ had risen bodily from the grave, is no less plain from his own declaration. The Lord, therefore, dealt with his faith and his unbelief, tenderly cherishing the one, and faithfully yet gently reproving the other.

We gather from these and similar testimonies that though doubts and fears in the Lord's people do partake of the nature of sin, yet our gracious Lord dealt with them more as infirmities than positive, actual, wilful transgressions.

But now contrast these tender and gentle reproofs of the doubts and fears of his disciples with the way in which our Lord dealt with obstinate, wilful unbelievers. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God." (John 8:24, 44, 47.) "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say we see: therefore your sin remaineth." (John 9:41.) "But ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." (John 10:26.)

But again, doubts and fears in the saint of God are often *temptations* springing from the subtle suggestions of Satan working upon an unbelieving heart. In this case they do not positively and actually spring from a man's own willing or unwilling unbelief, nor are they fostered and indulged by him,

for they are very burdensome and grievous to his spirit, contrary to the teaching of the Spirit in him, alien from the life of God, and opposed to his earnest desires and sincere breathings God-ward that he would give him a living faith to the saving of his soul. But they spring from the working of Satan upon our carnal mind, and the stirring up by the enemy of our souls of the unbelief that dwelleth in us. Doubts and fears may be known to be temptations of this kind when they distress the mind, and oppose themselves to that life of faith in the Son of God in which consist all our present safety and satisfaction, and all our hope of eternal glory. Doubts and fears, then, being temptations, the Lord does not deal with them as he deals with positive sins. He himself was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. And having been tempted as we are, so far from casting our temptations into our face as so many sins, he rather sympathises with us in and under them, as a merciful and faithful High Priest. Thus, though, as I said before, doubts and fears have in them the nature of sin, yet the Lord knoweth our frame, remembereth that we are dust, and dealeth with them, and with us, as encompassed by them, rather as infirmities that will ever cleave to us, than as those positive and actual sins which wound conscience and draw down his displeasure.

We see this clearly exemplified in the cases of Abraham and Sarah. The Lord gave Abraham a promise that he should have a son by Sarah when he was well stricken in years, on that remarkable occasion when he appeared to him in the plains of Mamre; and he repeated the promise in Sarah's hearing. Now Sarah was naturally barren, and to that was now added old age, rendering her, so to speak, doubly unfruitful. When, therefore, standing in the tent-door, she heard the Lord telling Abraham, that he "would certainly return unto him according to the time of life" (or as it might

be rendered "in the reviving year," that is, the following Spring), "and lo! Sarah his wife should "have a son," she, full of incredulity rather than unbelief, laughed within herself, saying, "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure"—that is, the pleasure of bearing a son in my arms—"my lord being old also?" Now this laughter of Sarah was not the laughter of scorn and contempt, still less of enmity or infidelity, but was rather the laughter of incredulity doubt and distrust of the Lord; and so far was clearly sinful. But she laughed with a kind of incredulous joy, as if the promise were too good to be true; and yet her very heart leaped in her at the thought and prospect, as she said, "Shall I of a surety bear a child which am old?" But the Lord did not deal with it as he dealt with the sin of the sons-in-law of Lot in not believing his exhortation, "Up, get thee out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city;" nor as he dealt with the antediluvians in not listening to the voice of Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, when moved with fear, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house, and by this act as well as his preaching condemned the world. (2 Pet. 2:7; Heb. 11:7.) But he dealt with it tenderly and gently, as a father dealeth with his children. "And the Lord said unto Abraham, wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." (Gen. 18:13, 14.)

In our text the Lord asks Abraham a question, leaving it to him to supply the answer: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

This, then, is the question which I have to answer this afternoon; and, extending it somewhat beyond its original intent, I shall answer it in two ways.

I repeat the question: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" I answer to it, *Yes*.

I repeat the question: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" I answer to it, *No*.

Thus you will have to listen this afternoon to a "Yes" and "No" sermon. I trust, however, that my Yea, will still be Yea, and that my Nay, will still be Nay; and thus you will not have a "Yea" and "Nay" sermon, though you will have a Yes and No discourse; for I shall endeavour, by the help of God, to show you that there are things too hard for the Lord; and to show you also, by the help of God, there are things not too hard for the Lord.

If, then, I am enabled to carry out my aim and intention, when I have taken up both sides of the question, and handled them in harmony with the word of truth, and the experience of the saints, I think you will be able to see what is, and what is not too hard for the Lord.

I.—It perhaps a little startled and surprised you to hear me say that things were things too hard for the Lord; for it seemed to you as if I thereby denied that he was possessed of infinite and omnipotent power. Let me then endeavour to clear up this difficulty; for the nature of God's almighty power is often much misunderstood.

i. In order, then, to understand this subject aright, we must draw a distinction between God's *absolute* power, and what we may call his *ordinate* power. As regards God's *absolute* power, with him all things are possible, those things excepted which do not imply a contradiction in terms, or which are not repugnant in their own nature to be done, or which are not contrary to the nature and perfections of God

to be done. That there are such things I shall presently show; but I must first explain what is meant by God's *ordinate* power. It is so called because the object of it is all things which God has ordained and decreed to be done; and having thus ordained them, he must perform them because of his unchangeableness. We have both of these powers expressed in those words of our gracious Lord: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53, 54.) The *absolute* power of God is implied in the expression that he could presently give him more than twelve legions of angels; but our Lord added, "And how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?" There he acknowledges God's *ordinate* power; for having ordained and decreed that his dear Son should die, he could not save him from death but by breaking his decree. We thus see that God's power acts only according to God's will, and that what his will orders and arranges his power effects. His will is the spring of his actions, and his power acts in harmony with it. Thus the Psalmist says, "He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased," no more, no less. (Psa. 115:3.) And we find the apostle speaking of the power of God as not only subordinate to his will, but also to his counsel, for he says of him: "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11), where we see that what the will of God ordains, his wisdom guides, and his power effects. In fact, the power of God, or rather, the exercise of his power depends upon his will, for the will of God is the supreme cause of everything in time, and his power is but his will perpetually working and bringing forth his eternal purposes. This explanation may seem to some of you dry, or difficult to understand; but it is necessary to be clear in such important matters, for unless we have right views of the nature of God's almighty power, we may make sad mistakes from not seeing how beautifully

and gloriously it harmonises with all the rest of his revealed perfections.

Having thus explained a little what is meant by the power of God, I shall now show you that though the power of God is in itself infinite and omnipotent, yet there are things which God *cannot* do: 1, some things from being impossible in *their own nature*; 2, some things as impossible to *his own being*; 3, some things as impossible to *his glorious perfections*; and 4, some things impossible because of *his ordination*. It is by showing the nature of these things that I shall best answer the question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" by saying, "Yes; there is."

ii. You must bear in mind, then, that omnipotence is but *one* of God's attributes, and that we must not sacrifice the other attributes of the divine nature to his omnipotence, as if it could be viewed distinct from or at variance with them, or could be put forth in opposition to them. A person might say, "If God is almighty; if he is omnipotent, there is nothing which he cannot do." I deny that. There are things God *cannot* do, because to do them would be contrary to the essential purity of his nature, and all that characterises him as the God of holiness and truth. Does not the Scripture bear me fully out here? "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie." (Heb. 6:18.) There you see a limit to omnipotence: it was impossible for God to lie. Again, "He cannot deny himself." (2 Tim. 2:13.) Again, "God, who cannot lie." (Titus 1:2.) Are not these Scriptural declarations which set a limit to God's omnipotence? It is impossible for God to lie because of his faithfulness. As he cannot die because he is life itself; as he cannot deceive because he is goodness itself, so he cannot lie because he is truth itself. In fact, he is omnipotent because he cannot do evil, and would not be omnipotent if he could. To lie is in man weakness not



strength, for liars are almost always cowards. If, then, God could lie, it would not only contradict his purity and faithfulness, and remove from under us the very foundations of our faith, but be in itself weakness, not power. There is an inability arising from weakness, and there is an inability arising from perfection. If the sun could diffuse darkness as well as light in the air, it would be from weakness in the sun, not from strength. You see, therefore, that, if I may use the expression, God's moral nature, the essential attributes of his infinite holiness, must never be made to clash with his omnipotence. God cannot cease to be; and as God cannot cease to be, he cannot cease to be everything whereby he is God. He cannot cease to be holy, pure, righteous, just, as he cannot cease to be everything which is loving, merciful, and gracious. We must take all the perfections of infinite Deity, all the attributes that are concentrated in the divine character, and not set one against the other, as though God's omnipotence could break through others of his divine attributes. Because God is almighty, he cannot do things contrary to the perfections of his divine nature. We say sometimes of an upright, honest, and excellent man, "He cannot do such a thing." If we hear his character slandered, or some gross accusation laid to his charge, we say at once, "I don't believe it; the man could never do such a thing." Why? Not because it was impossible for the man, a sinful man, to be betrayed into an unjust or sinful action; but because we believe there is that in the man's moral character, and especially if a partaker of grace, there is that in the power of grace in the man's heart which would not suffer him to do the thing laid to his charge, though as a poor sinner, left to himself and the power of temptation, he might do anything that is base and vile. How much more shall we refuse to believe that an infinitely pure God can do anything contrary to the purity of his divine nature. Thus you see there is a limit to God's omnipotence, arising from the

very perfections of his unspeakably pure and holy nature. In this sense, then, to do anything that is unjust or unholy, is too hard for the Lord; for to do so would be to deny himself, and be weakness not strength.

iii. But now I must take this point a little further and show that there are other limits to God's omnipotence besides the perfections of his nature. Observe, then, that a thing having taken place, it is impossible that it should not have taken place, so that God himself cannot alter it. Do you understand me? Take the case of the fall. The fall has taken place; our first ancestor sinned in the garden and fell, foully fell; and all those who were in his loins fell with him. That fact having taken place, it is beyond the power of God to alter its having taken place. He might have prevented it before it took place; he may over-rule it for our good and his glory; he may bring out of it that which shall be matter of eternal praise; he may make it the occasion of displaying the exceeding riches of his grace. But God himself cannot alter a fact which has taken place from having taken place. Thus, though God may prevent sin before it is committed, yet when sin has been committed, it will always be true that sin was committed. Though God pardoned the sin of David and the denial of Peter, yet it will be eternally true that David fell into sin; that Peter denied his Lord; nor can God himself make these sins not to have been committed when once they had been done. But observe the consequence which might arise if God could make a thing past not to be past. Then he might make himself not to have made a promise to Abraham, nor to have sworn to him an oath that he would be a God to him and to his seed after him. If, therefore, there were a power in God to undo that which was past so that it should never have been done, there would be no certainty of revelation and no foundation for faith. God at his pleasure might alter, disannul, and destroy all that he has himself done by sending

his Son to die, if it were possible that that which has been done might be said never to have been done. Thus what might seem to some a want of power in God and a limit to his omnipotence, is at once his highest perfection, and our greatest security.

iv. But now observe what follows from these necessary limits to God's omnipotence. The two limits chiefly are,—1st, that he cannot do anything contrary to the perfections of his own infinitely pure and holy nature; 2ndly, that he cannot do anything contrary to his revealed will; for to do the first would be contrary to his infinite holiness, and to do the second would be contrary to his infinite veracity and faithfulness.

1. But what a solemn and important bearing this has upon his dealings both with his enemies and his friends; for see the consequences of his not being able to do any thing contrary to the perfections of his infinitely holy nature. His justice, for instance, demands the punishment of sin; and therefore, he cannot but punish it. He cannot pass it by, because it would be inconsistent with his intrinsic righteousness, with his holy majesty, and his absolute justice to pass by transgression without taking any notice of it. This would make him like those heathen gods who either did not notice sin at all, or sanctioned it by themselves committing, according to the popular belief and the tales of the poets, the worst of crimes. Thus it is impossible for God not to punish sin, either in the person of the sinner, or, as he chose in the depths of his infinite grace, in the wondrous scheme of redemption, in the Person of the surety.

Again, God cannot take into his own bosom anything or any person that is vile, filthy, or unclean. As I was speaking this morning, the filth must be purged before the cloud of God's

presence comes. It is, therefore, morally as well as spiritually and scripturally impossible that God should take into heaven, the city of his own eternal abode, the seat of his celestial glory, the mansions of endless holiness and happiness, any thing or any one who is filthy, vile, and polluted. How plain is the Scripture here: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev. 21:27.) And again, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." (Rev. 22:14, 15.) What a solemn word of warning is this against those who live and die in their sins, unwashed, unjustified, unsanctified, and, therefore, without any meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

It is, therefore, impossible for God to make a man happy except by making him a partaker of his own holiness. He could not make a man truly happy as a sinner, that is wickedly, wilfully, and wantonly continuing such, without any deliverance from its guilt and filth, its power, love and practice; for sin will ever breed misery and wretchedness, and would do so in heaven itself, could he be admitted there with sin still working in him. It is the devil, the author of all wickedness, the murderer from the beginning, the enemy of God and of man, who, miserable himself, seeks to make all men miserable by stirring up in them the sin of their nature, and breathing into them all the pride, malice, enmity, wrath, and rebellion against God which ever work in his own infernal mind, that would turn heaven itself into hell.

As then it is impossible for God to take into his bosom

anything sinful or unclean, so it is impossible for him to take into the enjoyment of his eternal bliss and blessedness any one unrenewed in the spirit of his mind and not made a partaker of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, and without which he could not be happy, if even he were allowed to gaze upon the holy and blissful countenance of God in glory.

2. Again, it is impossible for God to act contrary to the declaration of his will, as revealed and made known in his own word. This is a part of that ordinate or ordained will of God, of which I have before spoken. He has given a revelation of his mind and will in the word of truth, and there it stands for ever and ever as a glorious revelation of God's fixed, eternal counsel, from which he never can depart; it being the transcript of his mind, stamped with the seal of his own veracity, and specially attested by his own oath and promise. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of God's word can ever pass away. This made the Psalmist say—"For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." (Ps. 119:89.)

You see, then, my friends, that there are things which are too hard for God; and you must observe from them what an awful bearing this fact has upon the state and case, present and to come, of the impenitent, the unbelieving, and the ungodly. If it is impossible for God to lie, if he cannot deny himself, if he can do nothing contrary to the perfections of his pure and holy nature, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? If it be inconsistent not only with the perfections of God, but with his revealed mind, not to punish the transgressor; if he cannot take to heaven the impenitent, the unbelieving, the unregenerate, it must be an impossibility for such to be saved, living and dying in their carnal state. To do so would be too hard for the Lord, for it would make him

deny himself, break his word, and violate his own infinite and glorious perfections.

v. But now let me present to you another view, another aspect of the same truth; and I think you will see in it that which meets the case of God's people, as well as that which meets, in what I have already explained, the case of his enemies. Thus, if it frown upon the one, it smiles upon the other; and if it be a mountain of brass to shut out the ungodly from the glories of heaven, it is for God's people as Mount Zion that never can be moved, but standeth fast for ever and ever. Has God then said he will by no means clear the guilty? Then he will by no means clear the guilty; and those that live and die under the guilt of sin, will live and die uncleared by God, and as such, will stand amenable to his justice and eternal wrath. But has God said that he will pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin in his people, in those that seek his face: in those that repent of, confess, and forsake their sins, who look unto, believe in, and hang upon the Lord of life and glory, and have no hope but in his blood and righteousness? He will be faithful to that word, for it is impossible for God to lie, either by belying his promises or belying his threatenings. And thus the veracity of God, which stands as a wall of fire against God's enemies to shut them out of the heavenly city, stands as a wall of fire round about God's friends, for he himself is "the glory in the midst." As, then, it is impossible for God to lie, every promise is armed with the faithfulness of God to accomplish, as every threatening is armed with the faithfulness of God to execute.

Have I not, then, in some good measure, fulfilled my promise, that I would endeavour to shew you that there are things too hard for the Lord? And will you not now bear me witness, that in drawing that narrow line, I speak in harmony with the word of God, in which he has revealed himself as a

God of holiness and truth, and that such a view of the subject, which I believe it is impossible for any rightly taught Christian to gainsay or deny, has a very important bearing upon the state and standing both of the godly and ungodly, both of those that fear God and those who fear him not.

II.—But now I shall take the other side of the question. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" To that I shall answer "No." As I have shown there are things too hard for the Lord, because contrary to his infinite perfections and revealed will and word; so I shall now show there is nothing too hard for the Lord which runs side by side, and moves in harmony with the manifestation of his will in the word of truth.

If you recollect, I drew a distinction between God's absolute power and God's ordinate power, and showed that the power of God always moves in concert with his will; for his power affects only that which his will ordains and his wisdom guides. So that the power of God is, as it were, subordinate to his wisdom and his will; for his will is the supreme cause of everything that occurs in time, and thus his power is but the perpetual working and constant efficacy of his omnipotent will. But we know not what the secret will of God is until made manifest, and therefore must go to his holy word, which is his revealed will, there to learn what the power of God is able to do and will do. Everything, therefore, that lies within the compass of God's will, as revealed in his word, can be and will be executed by the power of God. Now in this sense I may again ask the question: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" And I answer "No." But now let me apply this to particular cases; and

i. First to *difficulties and perplexities in Providence.*

There may be times and seasons with you when there seems

much against you, as regards your calling in life and the earning of your daily bread. Times are hard with you, and you scarcely know how the matter will turn, as mountains of difficulty present themselves on every side. Now, when these hard times and these providential dispensations come upon those in whom grace has not taken up its blessed abode, and to whom, as unacquainted with God and his dear Son, no throne of grace is presented to their mind as a place of resort, and no sweet promise is held forth in the word of truth to sustain their sinking hearts, oppressed by the power of temptation, or carried away by a sense of shame and by fears of what may be the eventual consequence of their present embarrassments, they will often run from this world upon the thick bosses of God's buckler, and to escape the shame of man, will rush unbidden into the presence of God. Their money, their credit, their reputation being all gone, and there being no prospect before them but poverty and disgrace; having no God to go to, no promise of help or deliverance on which they may hang, and no door of hope for time or eternity open to them, they yield to the temptations of Satan and the suggestions of despair, and put an end to their miserable lives. Now take a child of God: he may have the same or greater depths of poverty, for we little know to what straits some of the Lord's people are reduced. I was reading the other day, in manuscript, a little memoir, which I hope one day may be published, of a gracious woman, who had been, from a spinal complaint, laid upon a bed of affliction for many years, with a mother only to nurse her. Now, for a considerable period, the whole income to support them both was four shillings a week and two loaves of bread, out of which two shillings were required for firing, her complaint requiring frequent fomentations, so that for three years they never knew the comfort of a drop of tea and had to subsist on a scanty supply of bread and a little coffee; yet this poor afflicted creature was so supported by the power of



God, and though often hungry in body from positive want of food, yet was at times so fed with the bread of life that she could rejoice in her tribulation. Now, what a contrast with the miserable suicide, whose case I have depicted, is a scene like this. Look into that little cottage and see a poor, emaciated, afflicted creature, not only suffering continual and exquisite pain, but pressed down on every side by the depths of poverty, and yet bearing up against it all with the support of the Lord, and eventually brought forth into a wealthy place, not merely as regards the soul, but even as regards the things of providence; for when her case became better known, and the dark clouds which had gathered over her head from false accusations had been rolled away, her wants became fully supplied to the end of her life. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Did not she prove it so? And why should not you? Has he not declared that "your bread shall be given and your water shall be sure, that the gold and the silver are his and the cattle upon a thousand hills?" how again and again God's poor tried people have proved that the Lord can raise up friends to help them, when all their own help was gone, can open doors in the most unexpected manner, when those once open seemed all shut, and send them everything which they may require to relieve their pressing wants. If, therefore, any of you be tried in circumstances, and scarcely know what way to take, give not way to despondency. Take no sinful way of extricating yourself; but wait upon the Lord in prayer and supplication. He will provide. He that fed Elijah by the aid of ravens; he that caused the widow's cruse not to fail; he who could supply the wants of thousands with five loaves and two small fishes; he who could rain manna down from heaven in the desert, and bring water from the rock; is he unmindful of thee, O thou of little faith? Wait on him, seek his face, put your hand to no evil thing, and you will find he will appear for you in providence, to the joy of your soul. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Has he not appeared for you

in times past? Have you wanted any one good thing? Have you ever gone for three years without tasting a drop of tea from actual poverty, and lived upon a little bread and a few dregs of burnt coffee, without sugar, and suffering intense pain all the while both night and day?

ii. But now, take the case spiritually; for the text extends itself far beyond the domain of providence, and embraces the whole domain of grace.

1. It may be, that you are pressed down with a sense of *guilt upon your conscience*. You may be one of those in whom the Lord is beginning to work by his Spirit and grace. I would not willingly pass over any case; I shall, therefore, begin with the beginning. The spirit of judgment, of which I was speaking this morning, may be now in you, bringing to light all your secret sins, and passing judgment upon them; and the spirit of judgment, which is sitting in judgment upon your sins, may have been followed up in you by the spirit of burning in a fiery law, condemning and cursing you, and bringing a sense of the wrath of God into your soul. Under and in this fiery trial, your sins seem to be so great and aggravated, your feelings under them so acute, and your conscience so sore and raw, that you cannot believe that pardoning love and saving mercy can ever reach your soul. But may I not say, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Have there been no saints before you, in whom there has been the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning? Have none but you felt the curse of God in a broken law? Have none but you seen the evil of sin? Have none but you felt its guilt and burden laid upon your conscience? Have none but you sunk into despondency, gloom, doubt, and almost despair? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Then why not you receive mercy and pardon at God's hands? Why should not the Lord extend to you the same manifested mercy, shine into your

soul, lift up upon you the light of his countenance, speak peace and pardon to your heart, apply the blood of sprinkling to your conscience, and reveal his dear Son to you as he has done to thousands before you? "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Has he not sent his own dear Son to die for sinners? Did he not come to seek and to save that which was lost? Does not his blood cleanse from all sin, and why not you from your sin?

2. Or, you may be much oppressed by a sense of *the evil of your nature*; you may have had, in times past, glimpses and glances, sips and tastes of the Lord's goodness and love; and gone even further than that—had a sweet assurance of your interest in the precious blood of the Lamb. But the great deep was not then broken up; the evils of your heart were not brought to light; temptation had never assailed you, and your sins had never been raked up from the bottom of the pit of the horrid depths of your fallen nature. But now, the Lord has, for his own wise and gracious purposes, given you to see the evils of your heart, by breaking up the fountains of the great deep, and showing you what you are as a sinner in his holy and pure eyes. But this makes you doubt and fear, question the whole work of grace upon your soul, and often sink very low in despondency, as not being able to perceive a grain of grace in your heart. But is anything too hard for the Lord? Would not one word from his gracious lips dispel all this darkness, remove all these guilty fears, chase away these apprehensions, and bring your soul into sweet peace? You know it would; and this is the reason why you are secretly crying to him to speak a word to your soul, and to lift up upon you the light of his countenance. Here is the smoke going up out of your heart, of which you heard this morning, rising up to the Lord in many an anxious desire, fervent cry, secret sigh, hidden tear, earnest groan, that he would break through the dark clouds that hover over your

mind, and speak peace and consolation to your soul. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Has he not appeared for you in times past, and brought you out of as deep, if not deeper trouble?

3. Or you may have *backslidden* inwardly or outwardly, brought great guilt upon your conscience, chased away the dear Comforter, harboured filth in the sanctuary, and thus driven away the cloud, so that the smoke no longer seems to rise, or if it rise, only to choke you, make your eyes smart, and lodge in your throat as if it would rather stop your breath than mount up as sweet incense. As in the figure of smoking flax, you may have just enough life to cry, just enough feeling to moan, just enough power to look to the Lord from the very ends of the earth, and to have no hope or help but in him; for there has that been wrought in you by his Spirit and grace which will give you no rest, except in calling upon his holy name. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is then this your present case too hard for him? Does he not say, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jer. 3:22); and again, "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely for mine anger is turned away from him?" (Hosea 14:4.) How suitable are these promises to your case, and is it too hard for the Lord to fulfil them? One word from him, one soft whisper, one sweet smile, one heavenly touch, one gracious breaking in, would set all things right, make every crooked thing straight, and every rough place smooth, and fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

4. But you may have great *temptations*, and those temptations may be either of a very seducing and alluring nature, or of a terrific and violent kind. Satan suits his temptations to the character that he is seeking to draw aside. He knows our weak points; he sees exactly where to lay the

snare. He knows it would be in vain to bring carnal delights, sensual gratifications, and the lusts of the flesh before some because they would be at once rejected; for there is in them naturally that firmness of moral principle, which would immediately reject, and not be entangled in them. Now these he assails with his fiery darts, hurls the artillery of hell hot and fast into their carnal mind, and sets on fire all that combustible material of which it is full. But when thus assailed, they cannot believe it possible that a child of God should be subject to such feelings, exposed to such temptations, or ever have such vile and horrible thoughts and ideas working in his mind. Yet is anything too hard for the Lord? How, in one moment, he can rebuke the tempter, bid him flee, remove all these temptations that distress your soul, and so deliver you from them that they shall never more return, or at least not with their present power.

5. Or you may be placed, on the other hand, in very *critical circumstances*, where snares are being laid for your feet in all directions to entangle you in those lusts to which I have already alluded. Your calling in life may bring you into circumstances and amongst persons where you are continually assailed by temptations suitable to your flesh, and you are so perpetually exposed to them, and so brought into contact with some peculiar tempter, that you feel as if one day you must fall by his or her hand. Is anything too hard for the Lord? How, in a moment, by his providence or his grace, he may remove the temptation from you, or you from the temptation; or he may break the neck of it, that it may have no more strength; and either place you in circumstances where you shall not be tempted in like manner as you now are, or arm you with grace and strength to withstand it, resisting even unto blood, striving against sin. It is a subject on which I cannot enter as fully as I could wish; but I know the temptations to which young persons, both

male and female, are subject, and that none can escape them but by the power of God. How many young women in service, or as assistants in shops, or as engaged in those occupations which bring many of both sexes together, are exposed to continual solicitations, sometimes under an offer of marriage, to draw them aside; and how soon one false step, one giving way to temptation, may plunge them into sin and misery.

6. Or you may have to walk, in your journeyings onward, in *various paths of tribulation*; you may have, for instance, deep and trying *family* afflictions, and such a gap may have been made in your affections by a most distressing bereavement, that you feel as if it never could be repaired. A dear wife, a beloved husband, a darling child, may have been taken from your embrace, and so deep at present is the wound, that it seems to you it never can be healed. But is anything too hard for the Lord? If the object of your tender affection has died in faith and love; if you have a sweet testimony that he or she is with the Lord, and that he is wiping away the tears from his or her face, should not this be a balm to your bleeding wounds? And though nature ever will and ever must feel these heavy strokes, yet there is in the consolations of the gospel, when applied to the heart, a balm for every wound. If, then, the Lord should be pleased to drop into your soul a sweet sense of his presence and love, it will reconcile you to the painful bereavement.

7. Or, without experiencing these painful personal bereavements, there may be many *distressing things* in your family which cause you much pain and anxiety. You cannot see that in your children which you desire to see, and perhaps very much that it distresses you to see. But how many of the Lord's people have had these family trials before you. Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, all of whom were amongst

the most highly favoured saints recorded in the word, had their deep and painful family trials; but the Lord overruled them for their good, and granted them submission to them.

8. Or a circumstance may have taken place which seems of so *peculiar* a nature, that, according to your present feelings, nothing ever will or can reconcile you to it. There has been that blow struck in your warmest and tenderest affections, or against your character and Christian reputation, or that trying circumstance in Providence, or that most unexpected and painful occurrence in your own family, or that mysterious visitation in your own experience, that it seems to you as if nothing could ever make you see the end or object of it, and that it was permitted or ordained of God for the good of your soul. The dispensation at present is very dark and mysterious; you can get no light upon it as to the why or wherefore this is come upon you; you search the word to obtain some help there, but find nothing to meet the case. You wait anxiously under the preached word, if you can get any light or help from the mouth of God's servant; you look to the Lord himself with prayer and supplication, but it seems as if he shut out your prayer, and would give you no intimation that what has occurred should eventually work together for your good. But is anything too hard for the Lord? The time may come, and doubtless will come, when you will see the hand of the Lord conspicuously in your present trial, and so far from saying that you never should see the day when good would spring out of it, you will see it to have been one of the greatest blessings in your life; that the deep trial through which you were called to pass, and in which you felt convinced, so obstinate was unbelief, that you never should see the hand of God in it, was brought upon you by his special hand; and you will not only see the hand of God in it, but see a hand of love and tender mercy and rich compassion, in bringing upon you that particular occurrence, so that you would not have been without it for a thousand

worlds.

9. Again, under the *weight of a daily cross*; under the burden of a body of sin and death; under the various struggles you have to encounter as you move onward in the path of divine life, it often seems to you as if you could and should never *hold out to the end*; and you continually fear and apprehend that when the end comes it will find you wanting; that when you have to lay your head upon your last pillow, and there is only a step between you and death, that then all your doubts and fears, and all your guilt, sin, and shame, will lie upon your conscience as a load to press you down into despair, or be a millstone tied round your neck to whelm you in the very depths of hell. You paint to yourself a thousand fears, encompassing you in your last moments; you see yourself lying upon the bed of death; you seem even to hear the rattles in your throat, and to feel the sweat coursing in cold drops down your brow, and the last enemy seems to show himself in sight long before he comes; and you say, "Will it be with me on a bed of death as I often feel now? Shall I be as dark then, and as helpless then, and as much pressed down by doubt and fear then? Will the Lord be as silent then as he is now? Shall I have to die in the dark as I have often walked in the dark? And shall I leave no testimony behind for the comfort of the dear family of God, amongst whom I have lived and walked, or to be a balm to those dear relatives who shall watch my dying pillow? Lord, how am I to die—with thy presence in my soul, or with a cloud resting upon me, so that those around my bed shall not clearly know whither my soul is bound—for heaven or hell?" Is anything too hard for the Lord? How many through all their life, from fear of death, are subject to bondage. How many have painted a gloomy death as almost their certain lot. But none of their fears have been verified: instead of having the death they feared, full of darkness and gloom, it has been one of light and life; and



instead of being pressed down with guilt and fear, their soul has been rejoicing in the Lord under the sweet shinings in of his manifested love. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Has he not smiled upon a thousand deathbeds, and why not upon yours?

But, my friends, the Lord will make us feel that though his arm is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear, yet he is to be enquired of. He is indeed a God that worketh wonders; apparent impossibilities are nothing with him; he has but to speak and it is done. But he will make us know his power by making us feel our weakness. He will often keep at a great distance, and for a long time, in order to make us value his presence. He will make us sink very low that he may lift us very high. He will make us taste the bitterness of the gall and wormwood of sin that we may know the sweetness of manifested pardon. He will teach us to abhor ourselves in our own sight, and loathe ourselves for our abominations, before we shall see and know ourselves washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and to stand before him without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Lord in one sense is easy of access upon his throne of grace, but in another very hard to be got at. He invites his dear people to come and spread their wants before him; he encourages them with a thousand promises; he says in our text, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" But he will make us set a due value upon his visitations: they shall not be given to us very easily or very frequently that we may not hold them cheap. It is not "ask and have" immediately. We have to learn what sin cost our dear Redeemer; we have to see the holiness and majesty of God; we have to learn that though mercy is free, and grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin, yet it must be got at after many a struggle, many a cry, many a sigh and groan, and many a fervent petition; that though all fulness

dwells in the Lord the Lamb, and he invites us to come and take of the water of life freely, yet it is guarded on every side by many things that would drive us back. And thus he teaches us to put due value upon his grace, upon the visitations of his countenance and the words of his lips. They cost the dear Redeemer the deepest agonies of body and soul and sufferings of which no finite mind can form a conception; and, therefore, are not to be given out without teaching us to know through what channel they came, nor what it cost the blessed Son of God to give out of his fulness those supplies of grace by which he enriches our need.

Thus, though there is nothing too hard for the Lord, he will try faith and patience before he bares his arm. He tried the faith of Abraham, and the faith of Sarah, and the faith of Jacob, and the faith of all his saints of old; but he never was unfaithful to his word. They found in the end the benefit of trusting. They looked to him and were lightened, their faces were not ashamed, and in the end they reaped the benefit of all their sorrows and all theirs sighs in a full manifestation of his pardoning love.

I would have you, therefore, look at both these sides of the question; and I would, first, say a word to those who think that God is easy to be entreated, and that they have nothing to do but to ask that they may at once receive. Here men deceive themselves. Indeed it is the grand deception of the day. They are invited, by preachers of all denominations indiscriminately, to come to Christ, to make use of Christ, and take hold of Christ, and they think, from the way in which sometimes they are exhorted, sometimes warned, sometimes scolded for not coming at once, that to come to Christ is almost as easy as it is to come to breakfast or to come to dinner; and that Christ can be taken hold of by the hands of a natural faith, almost as readily and as easily as a

man takes a loaf from off the breakfast table and cuts himself a slice. Thus they perish in their sins, deluded by their own ideas of free-will, and, deceived by their ministers who preach to them, as if they had power to come to Christ if they would but do so. Hundreds die in unbelief, under the idea that Christ can be had recourse to whenever they please and his mercy found whenever it is sought. Now I would not, now I dare not set any limit to God's mercy. It endureth from generation to generation. It is to be built up for ever; and mercy, and mercy alone can save a sinner. Nor would I set any bounds to the grace of God; for where sin abounded, there doth grace much more abound. But I would say this, that mercy and grace are not to be played with, and not to be trifled with, not to be thought common things that any man can take or leave just as he pleases, or to be hawked about for common use, and offered in baskets full from door to door. I would say this, that the things of salvation are very precious and costly, as springing out of the counsels of God's infinite wisdom, the treasures of his boundless mercy, and the depths of his superabounding grace, as manifested in the gift of his dear Son, and in what he suffered to make them effectual to salvation. And as God sets a great value upon his own mercy and grace, he will teach us to set a great value upon them too. This he teaches us by making us know what we are in the Adam fall; by giving us lesson after lesson of our own sinfulness, misery, wretchedness, and helplessness, and often keeping us very long without a word to relieve our fainting mind or support our sinking spirit, that we may set a due value upon that which God so highly esteems, and not count the blood of sprinkling to be a common thing, despise the riches of God's grace, or think salvation is to be had at man's beck and call; but to set God's value upon that which God himself declares is so valuable.

And yet in the end it will be found that every promise of God

will stand; that all his declarations will come to pass; and that nothing is too hard for the Lord except to save a sinner not interested in atoning blood, a sinner not regenerated by the Spirit of God, a sinner who lives and dies in impenitence and unbelief. But for those in whose heart the Spirit and grace of God are at work to give them repentance unto life, a living faith in the Son of God, a good hope in his mercy, and a love to his name—I say to them, "Is anything too hard for the Lord to do for such and in such, seeing that he gave his only begotten Son for them, and has manifested the purposes of his grace by beginning a sacred work upon their heart, which he himself will bring to perfection for their eternal good, and his own immortal glory?"