

GIFTS FOR THE REBELLIOUS

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"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Psalm 68:18

The doctrines of grace are of no benefit to us, as individuals, without an experience of grace; nor, on the other hand, can we have any true saving experience unconnected with the doctrines of grace. The two are so closely united, that they never can be dissociated in the hearts of God's people. The doctrines of grace are the bones of the Bible, and the bones also of all spiritual experience. And just as our bodily frames, without those inward joints and levers which we call bones, would be but a mass of useless and immovable flesh; so all experience, as what is called such, unconnected with and dissociated from the doctrines of grace, would be but a useless mass of corruption. But, on the other hand, how useless would be the bones in our body, without the brain, heart, lungs, muscles, nerves, and all the wonderful apparatus of our natural frame! What an unsightly object a skeleton is, though every bone be in its place! It is only fit for a museum, to lecture hospital students upon.

But when those bones are clothed with muscles and sinews; when that amazing apparatus of internal life and sensation, action and motion, when eye and ear, touch and taste, and all that curiously-wrought frame which we possess, are added to the bony skeleton, then the union of the two forms a living man, who breathes, moves, and acts, by virtue of that natural life, which God has breathed into his nostrils. Now, so it is spiritually. To have nothing beyond a few

doctrines in the judgment is to be like a skeleton in a glass case at Guy's Hospital. There is in it no eye, though there be the vacant orbit; no ear to hear, though there be the bony apparatus; no inward heart to beat, no heaving lungs to breathe, no subtle nerves to run through every part, and communicate sensation to all. Thus a man may have the complete scheme of the doctrines in his head. yea, not a bone out of its place, and yet be so lifeless, dead, and dry, as to be fit only to be hung up in a museum. Ministers who preach what is called "experimental truth" are often misunderstood and misrepresented, as if they secretly slighted the doctrines of grace, because they warn their hearers against merely receiving them in the judgment, and because the main drift of their preaching turns upon the teachings of God in the soul. Many who are ignorant of this heavenly teaching, misunderstand and speak against them, because they are not perpetually holding up the dry skeleton, and shewing how every bone fits in its place: and because they dwell more upon the eye, the heart, the lungs, and the internal movements and sensations of spiritual life, as wrought by the hand of the Holy Ghost. I have thought, therefore, that a few words to clear up this misunderstanding would not be out of place, and might serve as an introduction to lead us to the text, in which we have a grand cardinal, fundamental doctrine set forth, and a blessed experience springing out of it.

That cardinal doctrine, that fundamental point, is, the **ascension of Jesus**. "Thou hast ascended on high." This fundamental point, the ascension of the Lord of life and glory to be a risen Mediator at the right hand of the Father, is here clearly stated; and yet, not drily as a mere abstract truth; for the benefits and blessings which spring out of it, are declared in connection with it; and thus it becomes clothed with the experience of these blessings in the hearts of God's people.

With God's blessing, then, we will look at the text as it lies before us. And as there are several clauses in it, we will endeavour, if God enable us, to travel through them one by one, and trace them out in an experimental manner. There are in it five distinct clauses—"Thou has ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also; that the Lord God might dwell among them."

I.—The first point spoken of in the text is, **the ascending on high of Jesus.**

As the soul is led and taught by the Spirit, it follows the Lord through all the various acts and sufferings of his life. The first spot to which the Holy Ghost takes the poor sinner is **the cross of Jesus.** That is the first real saving view we get of the Lord of life and glory—the Holy Ghost taking the poor guilty sinner, laden with the weight of a thousand sins, to the foot of the cross, and opening his eyes to see the Son of God bleeding there as a propitiation for sin. To be brought there by the power of the Holy Ghost, and receive that blessed mystery of the bleeding, suffering, and agonizing Son of God into our hearts and consciences, is the first blessed discovery that God the Spirit favours us with.

But we pass on from that to see Jesus **sleeping in the sepulchre;** for we have to die ourselves, and we want to see the Forerunner who has entered into the grave for us. We want to feel that we can lie down in the grave, and see that narrow bed in which our body will one day be stretched, in a measure perfumed by Jesus having lain there before us. And when we have travelled from the cross to the sepulchre, we then go a step further—to **the resurrection** of the Lord of life and glory. On the third day, we view him by faith

springing out of the sepulchre in which he lay entombed, rising up in glory and power for our justification.

And thus we see in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the hope of the soul for a blessed immortality. But we do not tarry there; as the Lord the Spirit gives us eyes to see, and moves our heart to feel, we travel one step further—that is, to **the ascension** of the Lord of life and glory; not tarrying on earth (**for he tarried not there**), but mounting up to see him sitting at the right hand of the Father, as the Mediator between God and Man, as the divine Intercessor, as the glorious Head of grace, as communicating out of his own fulness gifts and graces unto poor and needy souls, who are living in daily and hourly bankruptcy. These want to receive perpetual supplies of life, light, and grace out of his fulness, to keep them in the way wherein the Lord has set their feet.

So that the ascension of the Lord Jesus up on high, and his sitting at the right hand of God, when received into the conscience under the power of the Spirit, is not a dry doctrine, not a dead bone of a withered skeleton; but is so connected with all the feelings of our heart, with all our misery and ruin, with all our wretchedness, with all our guilt, with all our daily wants, with all our hourly necessities, that, when led by the Spirit's teaching to look at this Mediator at the right hand of the Father, it becomes a truth full of blessed sweetness and power to the heaven-taught soul.

By what steps do we usually embrace the truth as it is in Jesus? First of all, for the most part, we receive it **as a doctrine**; the judgment being more or less informed, the eyes of the understanding being enlightened to see it in the word. The doctrine for some time may be floating in our mind: but after a time, as the Lord leads us more into a knowledge of our own hearts, and into a deeper feeling of

our necessities, he lets down the truth from our head into the heart, and it then becomes **a truth**. It is very sweet to have a doctrine turned into a truth. But after a time, we want something more than a truth: we want it **as a blessing**. When we are brought into pressing straits and severe trials, we need the doctrines, which we first received into our minds as truths, now to be blessed by a divine application to our souls. Thus, what we first knew in our judgments as **a doctrine**, is afterwards received in our conscience as **a truth**, and then is applied to our very heart of hearts as **a blessing**; and so we find God's word, and eat it, to the joy and rejoicing of our souls.

Thus it is with respect to Christ's ascension. We receive it first as **a doctrine**, as a great and glorious part of the scheme of salvation; then we begin to see, as we are led more and more into a knowledge of it, what a wonderful **truth** it is, to have a Mediator at the right hand of God; to have an Intercessor pleading, by the efficacy of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, for poor, needy, guilty souls. This draws out the faith, hope, and love of the heart to this ascended and interceding Mediator; and then, as the Lord the Spirit reveals the virtue and efficacy of this glorious Mediator in the guilty conscience, the truth becomes a rich, unctuous, and savoury **blessing**.

So that far from experience casting out the doctrines of grace, it only leads the soul into a vital acquaintance with them; and we might as well think of saving our lives by drawing the bones out of our body, as of blessing our souls by casting out the doctrines of grace: yea, we daily feel more deeply the need of the doctrines being brought into our heart by divine power; we feel them more to be the stay and support of our soul, as the arm I am now raising is stayed and supported by the bones which God has placed there.

"Thou hast ascended on high." When sin, shame, confusion, darkness, and all the wretched workings of a depraved nature stand up like so many barriers betwixt our guilty souls and God, and the reality of there being a risen Mediator at the right hand of God the Father drops with a measure of divine power into the heart, then what a blessing the doctrine becomes, that there is such a Mediator, through whom guilty, bankrupt souls can find access to, and acceptance with that God whom they have been taught to fear!

II.—**"Thou hast led captivity captive."** The Holy Ghost here gives us, if I may use the expression, a glimpse of the triumphant procession of Jesus. Though hid from mortal eye, there was a triumphant procession, in which Jesus returned to glory; and to this we have allusions in scripture. For instance, we read there was a chant, which sounded through heaven, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in" (Ps. 24:7). So Paul speaks, "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he **made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it**" (Col. 2:15). The apostle is here alluding to a custom in ancient times of giving a conquering general a public triumph when he returned home. On these occasions they were always attended with a long procession of prisoners; and they used to reserve the conquered kings and princes to grace their triumph, considering that the higher the rank of their captives, the greater was the glory of the conqueror. The apostle, then, alluding to this, represents Jesus as "making a shew of them openly," that is, exposed to public view (**as the conquerors at Rome**), "the principalities and powers" whom he had spoiled, "triumphing over them," and dragging them as captives at his chariot wheels. The same idea is contained in the text, "Thou hast led captivity captive."

By "**captivity**," we are to understand those who exercised tyranny over others during the time they were allowed to reign. So that when Christ led captivity captive, he led bound in chains and fetters those who had kept in bondage and hard imprisonment, such as he came to redeem.

Let us, then, take a glimpse of some of those whom the Lord triumphant led captive. For instance,

1. There is **the law**. And does not the law bring bondage into every soul that knows its spirituality? We know not the purity and spirituality of God's law in the conscience, till we are brought into bondage by it. For this is the grand mark of the law, that "it gendereth" (**or begetteth**) **to bondage** (Gal. 4:24). Now that it "gendereth," or "begetteth," shews that there is a vital power in it; that it is not a dead letter: for a dead letter gendereth not. There must be life in the parent, in order to give life to the offspring. So when the law gendereth to bondage, it as a living principle produces guilt and fear in the conscience, and thus casts the soul into bonds and imprisonment.

Some of the Lord's people are not able clearly to trace out in their soul's experience whether they have passed through this work of the law upon their conscience. They cannot perhaps just put their finger upon the precise time, nor discern precisely its operation upon their soul; they cannot draw out an experience such as they read in books, and hear others of God's people unfold. This tries and exercises their minds, whether they have known anything of the law as working wrath in them; for they feel that the Law must be known in its spirituality and power as well as the Gospel.

The word of God gives us several tests as to the operation of the law upon a man's heart. **One** I have mentioned—that it "gendereth to bondage;" **another** is, that "it worketh wrath" (Rom. 4:15); **a third**, that "by it is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

Cannot you trace out these effects upon **your** soul? Have you never felt guilt and bondage before God; so that you have been shut up in a dark prison, out of which you could not come forth into the liberty of the gospel; so shut up and imprisoned, that nothing but the Lord's own word sealed upon your conscience could set you free? Here is a mark that points out one of the Lord's prisoners, "a prisoner of hope;" that he will not let himself be delivered, if I may use the expression, by false keys; he will not suffer any but the Lord himself to deliver his soul; and all other deliverers he looks upon as forgers that come to his prison cell with pick-locks. He knows that if not delivered by the Lord he will have, like a prisoner escaped and caught, to go back again—and have heavier chains put on him—to be put into a closer and darker cell than the one out of which he had fled. Such a soul has known something of the bondage of the law in his conscience. We read, that the children of Israel in Egypt "sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage." Again, "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die" (Ps. 79:11). Thus the quickened soul groans before God under guilt, bondage, hardness of heart, fears of death, and a thousand tormenting doubts how the scene will end. These things imprison the soul as in bonds and fetters of iron. And he that has known these bonds and fetters knows something of the spiritual application of the law to his conscience.

Now from this captivity none could ever be delivered except Jesus had risen up on high. The broken law never can pronounce a gaol delivery; therefore not a single prisoner could ever have come out of the condemned cell, but all must have remained in a state of bondage and wrath for ever, had not the Son of God obeyed its demands and suffered its penalties, and thus brought in an everlasting righteousness.

2. Again. **Death!** O what a captivity does the fear of death at times exercise over the tender consciences of God's people! There are some professors who affect to live always above the fears of death. But it is to be feared that in most cases this confidence rather resembles the hardihood of many a felon who has to swing before the doors of Newgate, than the sweet peace, which the Lord at times gives to his tried people. This boasting confidence does not arise from any divine testimony dropped into their consciences by the power of God; that is another matter. It is in many a hardened recklessness, resting on the letter of truth, the fruit of ignorance and carnal insensibility, not the living assurance of faith; and thus, though it takes another form, springs from the same root as the vain-confidence of the felon. The Lord's people, who have been brought solemnly to feel what eternity is, what a holy and just God they have do with, and that they have deserved a thousand hells, often painfully know, especially if their tabernacles be weak, what it is to sink very low under fears of death. When all is dark within and gloomy without: when they see not their signs; when there is no sweet testimony of interest in the blood and love of the Lamb: when unbelief and infidelity seem to carry all before them: when their families and circumstances all arise before their eyes: and Satan sets in like a flood to overwhelm them with a thousand terrors—in these seasons, Death, cruel Death exercises a sad captivity over them.

Now the Lord of life and glory has "led captivity captive." He "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). To accomplish this, the Son of God came into the world, as we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same: that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil: and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14, 15). The scriptures, therefore, do not speak of God's people dying; they call it "falling asleep." Thus it is written of Stephen, though he expired battered and crushed with stones, that "he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60).

So the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope: for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:13, 14). Jesus, the Forerunner, has passed through the portals of the grave. He has perfumed that narrow bed by his sacred body lying in it; and has risen out of it "because that it was not possible that he should be holden of it." "The sting of death is sin;" He has put away sin, and thus extracted the sting. "The strength of sin is the law;" He has fulfilled the law, and thus destroyed its curse. Thus, through the resurrection and ascension of the Lord of life and glory, the ransomed can sing this song when the Holy Ghost leads them into the experience of it. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

3. **Sin**, inward sin, the lusts of our depraved nature, the corruptions of our carnal mind, and all the oozings forth of that vile puddle, of that internal sewer **(for no London sewer ever carried into the Thames filth to be compared with that which chokes up at times our hearts)** bring sad bondage into the conscience of those who fear God. Some people think very lightly of sin. But I will tell you the character of those who think so. We have it pointed out to a Tee in the Book of Proverbs, "Such is the way of an adulterous woman: she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness" (Prov. 30:20). That is just the character of some persons in a profession of religion. They think lightly of sin: they will do the most inconsistent things, break through every precept and every check of conscience, and plunge recklessly and heedlessly into the worst of transgressions: and then feel no concern. They feel no godly sorrow; there is no rolling upon their beds at night, no great drops of tears gushing down their cheeks, no sobs as though their very hearts would break. O no; they say, "we are in the covenant; sin cannot damn us; sin cannot harm us: therefore why should we be troubled about it?"

But the Lord's people, those really taught by God's Spirit, have their consciences made tender; and these know what captivity sin exercises over them, and what trouble it causes them. Our lot, if we are God's people, is to have trials and troubles; and some have trials enough to make them sigh and groan sometimes nearly all the day long. Our poor tottering tabernacles, providential trials, family afflictions, unkind friends, slanderous and cruel enemies, the accusations of Satan, together with the gloom of our minds and the sinkings of our hearts, all form an accumulated weight of affliction. But none of these trials bring into such bondage, or lie so heavy on the mind, as the painful feelings produced in the conscience by the daily and hourly workings

of sin in the carnal heart. Our roving eye, our filthy imagination, our depraved nature, our backsliding, adulterous, idolatrous heart, is a greater burden to our souls than all our other troubles and trials put together.

Supported by the Lord, we can bear afflictions; but our depraved heart, in its rebelliousness, filth, and infidelity, robs the conscience of peace, because it fights against the Father, rejects the Son, and grieves the Spirit: and thus causes a Three-One Jehovah to hide his face and testify his displeasure. But the Lord has led this captivity captive. Sin shall not condemn us, if we have an interest in the Son of God. He has "made an end of sin." O that faith could follow him in this! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). What a glorious path for faith to mount up to her ascended Lord! When faith is in living exercise, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is no dry doctrine, no mere bone in the skeleton: but, clothed with experience, becomes a holy feast to the soul full of marrow and fatness.

If we could but view by faith the Lord of life and glory ascending on high as the risen Mediator, as the great High Priest over the house of God, leading captivity captive;—dragging as his vanquished prisoners **the law** that curses and condemns—**death** which has filled us with so many fears—and **sin** which has caused us so often to sigh and groan—if, I say, we could but take a faith's view of the ascended Mediator, and see him lead captive those enemies of our souls, it would be no dry doctrine, but would drop into our hearts as a shower, and fall like dew and rain on the parched soil.

III.—"**Thou hast received gifts for men.**" What men? **All** men? Why, if that were the case, they would all have it—would they not? Suppose a person were to lodge in a banker's hand a sum of money for **all** the children of one family; and the banker were not to let the eldest or the youngest have one penny of it—should we call that banker an honest man? Would not honesty consist in this, to give every penny of that which was entrusted to his charge to the persons over whom he was made trustee, and for whose advantage he received it? To say then, that **all** men are interested in the gifts of God, would be to make the Lord Jesus Christ a dishonest Mediator at the right hand of the Father. He would have received gifts for all, and yet does not give them to all; has received grace for all, and does not bestow grace upon all; has received eternal life for all, and does not give eternal life to all; has received pardon for all, and does not make known pardon to all! Surely this doctrine would make the blessed Lord of life and glory at the right hand of the Father to be dishonest and unfaithful to his trust. I could not venture to use a word that would be applicable to him, supposing such a doctrine could be substantiated: I would not give utterance to it, even in thought. If he is, as we know he is (**blessed be his Name!**), "full of grace and truth," would he not give to the last mite everything put in his hands? Would not his loving heart and sympathising bosom deal out every grace and gift stored up in his fulness? And will one intended recipient be omitted? Will one person be passed by for whom mercy was designed?

When then it is said, he "received gifts for men," it is put generally for some men. It does not say, '**all** men.' There is a sweet ambiguity to my mind in the words "received gifts **for men,**" because it is **as men** that we receive them. The Holy Ghost does not expressly state whether some, few, or many are intended. It is literally, "**for man,**" for a fallen child of

Adam, for ruined man; that we, feeling our need, our frailty and weakness, our sinfulness and helplessness, might come to Jesus as the fallen children of a fallen parent to obtain pardon and peace.

But what has he received? **Gifts.** These are freely bestowed by the Father; lodged in him as the all-sufficient Mediator; and communicated out of his fulness to the sheep of his fold. But of what use are gifts except to those who need them? You know, if a person does not want anything, a gift is an insult. You would not venture to offer a sixpence to a nobleman rolling by in his carriage. It would be an insult; not a gift. But a poor starving beggar would receive with gratitude what the wealthy nobleman would throw away with contempt. Is not this the case spiritually? If I want nothing; if I am sufficient in myself for everything; if I am strong, holy, righteous, wise, going to heaven easily and comfortably—what do I want of the Lord's gifts or graces? What do I want of divine communications to my heart and soul?

And is it not true literally and naturally, as I am sure it is spiritually and supernaturally, that the more deeply we are sunk in poverty, the more the gift is needed, and the more the gift is valued? The preciousness of the gift rises just in proportion to the want of the person to whom it is given. Look at it spiritually. When my eyes stand out with fatness, and I have more than my natural heart can wish: when I have as much religion as I can hold, and tower to heaven in vain-confidence (**though, through mercy, God never lets me get there**), yet supposing I could get there, what should I need of the gifts dropping down into my heart from the fulness of the Son of God? What need of light, life, grace, and mercy—what need of the divine presence -what need of any one heavenly communication? But the more deeply I sink into soul poverty and soul wretchedness: and the more I feel

of my thorough ruin and insolvency—do I not want all the more, and prize all the more, the gifts of grace which are treasured up in the fulness of Christ to supply that necessity?

Now the Lord God Almighty foreseeing the destitution of his people, and foreseeing the depths of ruin and misery into which they would sink; foreseeing the fall of our first parents and all its dreadful consequences, appointed this Mediator, and lodged in him, in his divine fulness, all spiritual gifts, graces, and supplies for the wants of his people. Therefore, we read, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). It is out of his fulness that everything is received to save, bless, and comfort the soul.

But what are those "gifts?" Time will scarcely allow me to go through them all; yet I cannot pass by the words without specifying a few.

1. The gift of faith, for we read expressly, "it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). This is the grand master-grace of the soul; it is the grand wheel, which moves every other wheel in the heart; it is the eye, the ear, the hand of the new man of grace. Only so far as we have faith, and the Lord draws out this faith in exercise, have we any true spiritual feeling. But what makes me prize the gift of faith? It is knowing so much and so painfully the inbeing and inworking of unbelief. Is not this the case naturally? What makes me prize health? It is having a poor weakly tabernacle. What makes me prize rest? Fatigue. What makes me prize ease? It is pain. What makes me prize food? It is hunger. What makes me prize the cup of cold water? It is thirst. By these feelings, I not only know the reality by the want of it, but also enjoy the blessing when communicated.

It is just so spiritually, as naturally. What can I know of faith, except I am exercised (**and exercised I am more or less daily**) by the workings of unbelief, infidelity, questionings of the reasoning mind, and all the spawn of an unbelieving heart? As the soul is tossed up and down (**and often it is tossed up and down on this sea of unbelief**) it learns to prize the harbour of faith. And when the Lord mercifully communicates a little faith to the soul, and faith begins to realize, feel, experience, and feed upon the truth as it is in Jesus, then we know what faith is by the possession of it. We want two things to teach us the enjoyment of things. We want hunger to teach us what an appetite for the loaf is: and we want the loaf to teach us the sweetness of bread, we want fatigue to teach us the sweetness of laying down our bodies on a soft bed: and we want the soft bed to teach us how sweet rest is. We want pain and sickness to teach us the want of health: and we want health to teach us the enjoyment of health. And so spiritually. These two feelings are so united and locked into each other; the one is such a wondrous mortice, and the other such a wondrous tenon; they so fit into, confirm, and strengthen each other, that neither can be spared.

What a mercy it is that the Lord has the gift of faith to bestow! Here are poor souls toiling, troubling, labouring, groaning, sighing, oppressed with unbelief, that great giant in the heart, who has slain his thousands and tens of thousands. How our souls sometimes sink down under this wretched unbelief! But how we prize the faith all the more when it comes! How all the sinkings make the risings higher—and all the sadness makes the change more blessed! As the tossings to and fro of the sailor upon the sea, with all the perils and sufferings of the voyage, make the calm harbour so pleasant; so all the tossing up and down of unbelief endears the holy calm of living faith to the soul.

2. But the Lord has the gift of **hope** also to bestow. What a blessed grace that of hope is! Men despise hope in our day. They are like the nobleman, who would throw the sixpence in your face; nothing will do for him under a thousand pounds, or a large estate. Many who profess religion are like this nobleman, who perhaps has all his estates mortgaged, and is really not worth a penny: but he cannot descend from the heights of his grandeur to own himself an insolvent. So many of these high and lofty professors despise a good hope through grace, and nothing will do for them but assurance; though when we come to the Spirit's work upon the conscience, they have never felt the inward witness of the Holy Ghost that they are the children of God. The Lord's people prize everything that God communicates with power and sweetness to the souls. I have often been glad to feel the springings up of a gospel hope, in the absence of clearer testimonies.

How the scriptures speak of "a good hope through grace:" and call it "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil!" What a blessed grace must that be which thus enters into the very presence of Christ! How too, the word of God speaks of it as the twin sister with faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13); and declares, that it "maketh not ashamed," because it springs out of the "love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 5:5.)

Now we learn what "a good hope through grace" is, by being tossed up and down on the waves of despondency, and almost at times sinking into despair. Evidences so darkened, the heart so shut up, the mind so bewildered, sin so present, the Lord so absent, a nature so carnal, sensual, idolatrous, and adulterous—no wonder that amidst so many evils felt or feared, the soul should at times sink into despondency. But

at such seasons the blessedness of "a good hope through grace" is found; and when this anchor is cast into and enters within the veil, taking hold of the blood and righteousness of the great High Priest, how strongly and securely it holds the ship, so that it shall not be utterly overwhelmed in the billows of despair!

3. **Love**, too, is another gift, which the risen Mediator has received, that he may freely communicate it out of his fulness to his people. And we must be brought to feel that it is **a gift**. Could we produce or keep it alive in our own hearts, we should burn incense to our own skill or our own care. But when we often feel as hard as the very pavement on which we tread; and when we can no more create one feeling of love towards Jesus, his people, his cause, or his truth, than we can touch with our finger the comet in the sky; nay, what is worse, when we feel not merely the want of love, but enmity, we are convinced by painful experience, that the least feeling of love is the gift of the Lord.

Some perhaps will scarcely believe that a child of God can feel enmity against Christ: but his carnal mind is unmitigated enmity against him. And O, what a cutting feeling it is for a follower of the Lamb to have a principle in him which hates Christ—hates, bitterly hates his Person, hates his holiness and purity: which could join in the cry. "Crucify him, crucify him," and push and strike him with the Roman soldiers and the Jewish rabble. Unless painful experience convinced us that there was such a dreadful principle within, we could not believe that there was this devilish enmity in our heart against him whom our souls desire to love and adore. But what should we know of the pure and precious gift of love if we were not thus experimentally convinced that we could not create it? And when given, must it not be tried? It is the trial of love that makes it manifest.

How often it is so with the mother of a family. She has, perhaps, a number of children, five or six, and she does not know which she loves most. But perhaps the Lord lays his afflicting hand on one of them, and the child is likely to die. How soon the mother begins to feel the yearnings of love toward her sick child! She did not feel this while the child was playing about; but directly the Lord lays his hand upon it, and sickness comes, then what love the mother has—love which she never knew before! So with our partners in life: how many hours may pass away without our particularly thinking upon them, while there is nothing to call forth our love; and perhaps, the husband and wife (**I do not speak here experimentally**) may have been jangling and wrangling, instead of being mutually kind and affectionate. But if the Lord lays his hand of affliction upon one of them, how soon all these things are dispersed, like the clouds before the rays of the sun this morning!—how soon love and tenderness flow in, and all unkind feelings are forgotten! So with the soul that feels enmity, coldness, deadness, hardness, carnality, perverseness, and aversion to everything holy and heavenly.

These exercises try love. How many poor children of God are obliged to drag as it were their bodies to chapel! How often have I come into the pulpit with a thousand rebellious feelings, and wished I was anything but a preacher! But when we begin to feel a little life in our soul, and the heart is melted and softened by the goodness of the Lord, we sing a different note, and say. "How good it is to be here! O wretch, wretch, to have such an aversion to those things which my inmost soul desires to love! What a vile creature was I to loathe and be weary of the Lord, and of these heavenly realities in which I know all my happiness really to consist!" But what know we about love, if we have not all this enmity, carnality, and coldness to try it? When we have been

exercised with all these wretched feelings, and the Lord begins to drop into our hearts a little mercy and grace, and to draw forth our affections unto him, we then begin to feel what a sweet thing love is.

Love is the sweetest balm man can taste in this life. It is so naturally. There is a sweetness in love. When we love our wives, our children, our friends, there is a sweetness and tenderness in the very feeling, that is—as moralists say of virtue—its own reward. Coldness, dislike, envy, prejudice, jealousy, suspicion, peevishness, quarrelling—these sparks of hell burn and torture every spot on which they fall. And so, if ever there is a hell in a man's bosom, it is when full of hatred against God and his people. But if ever we feel a foretaste of heaven, it is when the Lord kindles some meltings of love, some drawings of affection toward Jesus and to them that are his. Then enmity and prejudice flee away; and we feel as if we could take all the people of God into our bosom, and say, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

And so with every other grace, such as filial fear, meekness, humility, godly sorrow, contrition, self-abasement, patience, prayerfulness, watchfulness, heavenly-mindedness, and every other fruit of the Spirit: they are all gifts which Jesus has received as the risen and ascended Mediator, and which he has to bestow upon those who feel their need of them.

IV.—But we cannot pass over the next clause of the text, "**even for the rebellious also.**" Blessed be God for these words! My friends, what would become of your souls and of mine, if God's gifts and graces were for the pious, religious, holy and consistent? My soul could have no part nor lot in that matter, I am sure. But "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). We cannot erect a ladder of piety, and clamber up into

the presence of God by becoming, by our own strength, wisdom, and righteousness, what is called decidedly religious and serious. Before we can rise up, we must fall low. We must sink down into a sense of our own ruin and helplessness, feel our thorough want of everything good and Godlike, have the secrets of the charnel-house we carry about with us opened up to our view: and then, when sunk to the lowest, be lifted by the Lord himself up out of this abyss of ruin. O that just suits the poor, guilty, filthy wretch, who has nothing but rags and ruin to call his own, and at the same time it enhances the glory of the Mediator, and puts the crown upon his revered brow!

"For the rebellious." What a painful thing it is to be rebellious! Would to God I were never so! I would be submissive; I would be patient; I would be meek; I would be gentle; but to be rebellious—there is hardly any feeling worse than rebellion to a man whose conscience is made tender in God's fear. To have rebellion against a holy and wise God; rebellion against his dealings with us in providence; against his teachings in grace; because we have not more of the light of his countenance: because we have not more and clearer testimonies and manifestations! We know in our judgment that God cannot err in any of his dealings, and yet to find at times such awful rebellion against God—O how painful it is! The least trifle can work up rebellion. It does not want a storm or a gale to lift up its proud waves. The slightest breath, the faintest breeze that blows, will at times stir up the billows of the rebellious heart, and make it swell with tumultuous heavings. Nay, the heart at times, like the sea in an earthquake, will work itself up into rebellion, without the least breeze to ruffle it.

Even when all things are smooth in providence, and the Lord is showering down his temporal mercies, rebellion will arise.

As the very warmth of the sun which ripens the fruits of the soil makes the beer ferment and turn sour in the cask, so the sun of providence often sets rebellion at work. "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked." Now, this is what makes it so grievous. What a trying thing it is to you parents, when you have done all you can to feed, clothe, and educate your child, and been uniformly kind and affectionate towards him. to find that this perverse offspring will do nothing else but fume and sulk, and plague you with his rebellion continually. This is just a picture, an outline, of what our hearts are by nature: perpetually fuming, sulking, fretting, and rebelling against the Lord: though perhaps they have been cut down by guilt about it, and have fallen down bleeding before God under a sense of vileness and horrible baseness.

But what a mercy it is to the poor souls that groan and grieve under a rebellious heart, that this ascended Mediator has received gifts for them! It is not your patience, meekness, and good temper, nor your gentle and quiet disposition, that bring down grace into your hearts; but God the Father has lodged all the graces and gifts of the Spirit in his dear Son, and they are given to you because you have an interest in his blood and righteousness. The Lord teaches us this. If we were always patient, meek, holy, submissive, never harassed by the Devil, and never felt the workings of corruption, we should begin to think we had some power to please God in ourselves, and should slight and neglect a precious Saviour. As Bunyan said of himself, before the Lord shewed him what he was, "I thought I pleased God as well as any man in England." But when taught by painful experience what a depraved nature and rebellious heart we carry in our bosom, when the Lord lets down a little mercy and grace into our soul, we then know the blessed quarter whence it comes, and learn to abhor ourselves and bless his holy name.

V.—But after all, the chief beauty of the text, the grand mystery of it, is contained in the last clause, which time will not allow me to unfold, even if I had the ability, for it is the crowning point: **"That the Lord God might dwell among them"**—that the Lord God might have a temple in which he will dwell, a sanctuary to fill with his glory, a people to shew forth his praise, a heart in which he himself might live and lodge, and, if I might use the expression, find himself a home. What a mystery is couched in that language of Isaiah, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, **with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.**" (Isai. 57:15.)

O what a mystery that God should have two dwelling-places! The "heaven of heavens," that "cannot contain him," and the humble, broken, and contrite heart! But in order that the Lord of heaven might have a place in which he could live and lodge, God gives to his people gifts and graces: for he cannot come and dwell in the carnal mind, in our rebellious nature, in a heart full of enmity and wickedness: he therefore makes a lodging-place for himself, a pavilion in which the King of Glory dwells, the curtains of which are like the curtains of Solomon. His abode is that holy, divine nature, which is communicated at regeneration—"the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Thus Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17); and is in his people, "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). And this made Paul say, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This is the object of God's dealings—that the Lord God might dwell in his people; that there might be a union betwixt the church and her covenant Head: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be

made perfect in one" (John 17:23). This is the grand sum of all God's dealings, the unfolding of the grand enigma, the solution of the incomprehensible mystery, "God manifest in the flesh"—that the Lord God might dwell in his people; "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (2 Cor. 6:16) and thus glorify himself by filling their hearts with his grace and glory, as Solomon's temple was of old, and that they might enjoy him, and be with him when time shall be no more. This is the reason why he received gifts for the rebellious; this is the grand key to all the Lord's dealings with the soul, and all his mysterious leadings in providence—that the Lord God might dwell in the hearts of his people here, and be eternally glorified in them in a brighter and a better world.

And to what conclusion does this lead us? To this—that only so far as we have received gifts into our heart and conscience out of the fulness of the Mediator, only so far does the Lord God dwell in us, and only so far have we any evidence we are among his people. Therefore we must take the two things in connection. Want will not do alone—riches will not do alone; unbelief will not do alone—faith in the doctrines will not do alone. But when riches meet want, pleasure meets pain, food meets hunger, water meets thirst, balmy blood meets a guilty conscience, and the robe of righteousness meets the naked soul—then the soul is humbled and God glorified. And this is the grand end of all God's dealings and all God's dispensations, that the Lord God might dwell in his people. It will be the glory and bliss of heaven: and eternity itself will never fathom that mystery: for till we have the line of God to measure it, we never can have a true, right, and perfect conception of it.