

## Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels

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"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." 2 Cor. 4:6, 7

If we examine with a little attention the chapter preceding that from which my text is taken, we shall find that the apostle draws in it a very striking and close parallel between the two covenants, or, as they are sometimes called, dispensations—the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of the gospel: his object being, by contrasting the one with the other, to show the superiority of the latter over the former. He grounds his comparison between them upon a remarkable incident recorded in the book of Exodus (34:29-35), where Moses is represented as coming down from the mount, and his face shining with such resplendent glory, that Aaron and the children of Israel "were afraid to come nigh him." The glory which thus shone on the face of Moses was a reflection of the glory of God which he had seen for forty days and forty nights on Sinai's top; but in the glory, thus reflected on his countenance, there was on other grounds deep significance. Moses, you will remember, was the typical mediator of that covenant: as we read, "It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." (Gal. 3:19.) As being then the mediator of the covenant given from mount Sinai, the glory of that dispensation was typically represented by the shining of his face.

Now if we examine the nature of this contrast a little more

closely, we shall see that there are six points in which the glory of the dispensation of the gospel is superior to the glory of the dispensation of the law.

1. First, the dispensation of the law was only *in the letter*: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:6.) By the word "letter" the apostle means that the law, though it was written and engraved in stones, did not go beyond the bare outward command. Though it forbade sin by the most terrible injunctions, and commanded perfect love to God and man under the most solemn curse, there was in it no communication of power to obey, no ministration of the Spirit to enable to love. Contrasting, then, the gospel with this feature of the law, as a dispensation of the letter only, the apostle says that it is "of the Spirit;" that is, the gospel reveals and ministers the Spirit to those who believe, and to whom it comes as the power of God unto salvation; for when the gospel is preached "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," it comes unto the people of God, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.)

2. The second point of contrast between the two dispensations is, that the law is a *killing letter*, and therefore the *ministration of death*. It was not ordained to give life: it was a revelation of the holiness, justice, and righteousness of the Lord God Almighty as a consuming fire—a proclamation, amidst thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud, of the demands of God upon the obedience of man; but not giving him any help to obey them. It therefore is and ever must be a killing letter, slaying and slaughtering all who are found in its hands, and bringing them under its tremendous curse. But "the spirit *giveth life*;" that is, the very spirit of the gospel is life: for, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, it communicates

spiritual and eternal life to the soul.

3. A third point of contrast is that the law is the *ministration of condemnation*. The law is called "the ministration of condemnation," because it is a means whereby condemnation is communicated. It is a revelation, a discovery, and, if I may use the expression, a vehicle for carrying the wrath of God into the conscience, and thus registering not only externally in the letter but internally in the heart the terrible anger of the Almighty against sin. Nor was it ever meant to do anything but to condemn the sinner and bring him in guilty before God. It is, therefore, emphatically "the ministration of condemnation," as it administers condemnation to every soul found under it. There is a glory in this, though a glory terrible to man as a sinner; for as a revelation of the wrath of God against all unrighteousness, it glorifies and magnifies the holiness and justice of the sovereign Judge of all. But, as contrasted with this, the gospel is the *"ministration of righteousness."* And it is so termed because it reveals and brings to light what the apostle elsewhere calls "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:21); that is, not the intrinsic righteousness of God, but the display of that righteousness whereby he can "be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

4. A fourth point of contrast is that the law was but *for a time*, but the gospel *abideth for ever and ever*. The law "was added," as the apostle elsewhere speaks, "because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." (Gal. 3:19.) As a dispensation, therefore, it was as if a parenthesis between the covenant made with Abraham and the coming of Christ. When, therefore, the Son of God came in the flesh to fulfil the whole of the moral law by his obedience to its commands, and the whole of the ceremonial law by his sacrifice, bloodshedding,

and death, the law, as a dispensation, passed away, its object being fulfilled, because the whole of it was perfectly accomplished by the incarnation, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the only begotten Son of God. All must admit that a glory which remains must be more excellent than a glory which passes away, as the glory of the abiding sun exceeds the glory of the fading stars.

5. The fifth point of contrast is that the law was a *veiled* dispensation, but the gospel an *unveiled* one. This, indeed, as I have before observed, was typified by that remarkable circumstance, that when Moses' face shone so brightly that Aaron and the children of Israel were afraid to look upon it, he put a veil over his face. This act of Moses, as the typical mediator of that covenant, was emblematic of two things; first, that the glory of that dispensation was a *veiled glory*. This was analogous to the "thick veil" which rested upon the mount when the law was given (Exodus 19:16), when, to use the language of the apostle, there was on it "blackness and darkness and tempest." (Heb. 12:18.) But, secondly, the veil upon the face of Moses typically represented *the veil that is upon the human heart*, and especially the heart of the literal Israel: "But even unto this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart." (2 Cor. 3:15.) Now, as contrasted with this, the gospel is an unveiled dispensation. "We all with open (or unveiled) face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord."

6. The sixth and last point of contrast is that the law is a dispensation of *bondage*, for "it gendereth to bondage." (Gal. 4:24.) But the gospel is a dispensation of *liberty*: "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17.)

Having thus proved the superiority of the gospel over the

law, the apostle in our text shows the effect of a spiritual reception of it into our hearts. He compares it to a treasure deposited in earthen vessels. With God's help and blessing, therefore, it will be my endeavour this morning to show you what this treasure is, how it is communicated, where it is lodged, and why the Lord has so lodged it; but this will be more apparent if I shall be enabled to bring clearly and experimentally before you,

I.—*First, what the treasure is:* "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

II.—*Secondly, the mode of the communication of this heavenly treasure to the soul:* "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of this glory."

III.—*Thirdly, the place in which it has pleased him to lodge this heavenly treasure:* "Earthen vessels."

IV.—*The reason why God has been so pleased to deposit it:* "That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

I.—My first object then is to show you *what* this treasure is.

Now what is the scriptural idea of a treasure? In ancient times property being very insecure, and there not being those modes of investing money, and thus making a profitable use of it, which modern skill has devised, it was a custom to hoard gold and silver in large heaps. Kings especially were accustomed to have "treasure houses," as Pharaoh had his "treasure cities" (Exod. 1:11), in which they stored up vast amounts of coin. Those are called by the prophet "treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret

places." (Isai. 45:3.) Sometimes also for greater security money was buried in the earth; and to prevent it being scattered it was frequently deposited in earthen vessels; as we read in Jeremiah, where the Lord bids him "take the evidences of the purchase and put them in an earthen vessel that they may continue many days." (Jer. 32:14.) Similarly in the parable, we read of "treasure hid in a field, which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." (Matt. 13:44.) By this treasure he was enriched for life. From those passages then we may gather up the scriptural meaning of the word "treasure," and we shall find that it includes two leading ideas. 1. First, it is that which makes or manifests a man to be rich. And, 2, it is a large amount of wealth stored up for safe preservation. Having thus gathered the scriptural idea of the word treasure, it may the better prepare us to enter into the meaning of the apostle in our text; for we may be well assured that "the treasure," of which he there speaks is not earthly treasure, which may be squandered and lost, or abused and perverted to the worst of purposes; but a heavenly treasure, which makes the soul rich unto God and wealthy to all eternity.

i. We can have no doubt what the treasure is *in itself*, for its character and nature are written as with a ray of light in the language of our text. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This then is the treasure, and it consists mainly in two things—*light* and *knowledge*; and a light and a knowledge of such a peculiar character and of such a heavenly nature as give us a spiritual sight of, and an experimental acquaintance with the glory of God as shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant. (Heb. 12:24.) As Moses was the typical mediator of the Old Covenant, so Jesus Christ is the real Mediator of the New; and as being the Mediator of the new Covenant, it is in him—in his Person and in his face—that the glory of God especially shines; for he is the glory of the new covenant. We will look then at this glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as the Holy Ghost has laid it down in the Scriptures of truth, that we may find in it some evidence for ourselves whether God has ever shone into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of this glory as our own possession.

1. First, then, see how the *wisdom* of God shines forth in the constitution of the *Person* of Jesus Christ; for the word "face" here may be translated "the Person" of Jesus Christ, it being the same word as is rendered "Person" in that passage where the apostle says, "If I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sake forgave I it in the person of Christ." (2 Cor. 2:10.) By the Person of Jesus Christ we may understand here not so much his Divine Person, as the Son of God, as his complex Person as God-man—Immanuel, God with us. Now what a glorious display there is of what the apostle calls the "depths of the riches of the wisdom of God" in the constitution of the Person of Christ. Look at man in his lost, ruined state through the Adam fall; see his utter distance from God by wicked works; view the alienation of his heart, and the desperate state of enmity, rebellion, and every imaginable and unimaginable depth of misery and wretchedness into which he has been cast by sin original and actual. How can a plan be devised to extricate him from his fallen condition; to restore him to the favour of God; to reconcile and bring him near; and fully deliver him from all the dreadful consequences of his utter departure from original righteousness? For bear in mind, that if this be done, it must be done in the fullest harmony with every perfection

and attribute of the self-existent, immutable perfection. This point is not often considered; but the whole of the human race must rather perish than that any one perfection of the Almighty suffer the least infringement. But how can man be saved upon such terms as these? Where will be God's justice if man is pardoned? Where God's holiness, where his righteousness, if sin be passed by as though it had never been committed? What would become of human laws if the stern attribute of justice which is given to kings is to drop out of their hands like a broken sword? Law ceases to be law when not executed. How then can God's justice be preserved intact, in all its fulness, majesty, and glory, if man be let off unpunished when he has committed such crimes against the Majesty of heaven? But that mystery which never could have been solved by the united intellect of men and angels, God himself has solved in and by the constitution of the Person of Christ as God man, for therein we see a display of his infinite wisdom in contriving a way by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, not only to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), but also to put away sin by the sacrifice of Jesus. (Heb. 9:26.) O wondrous display of eternal wisdom, that by sending his own dear Son to suffer in the sinner's place and stead, the justice of God should have all its righteous claims fully satisfied, and yet that mercy should be able to rejoice against judgment! (James 2:13.) O wondrous scheme, worthy to fill heaven with anthems of eternal praise, that a way should have been contrived to harmonise the seemingly jarring attributes of God, that he might be just, scrupulously just, and yet "keep mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity transgression and sin."

2. But view also in this wondrous plan of redeeming blood the infinite *love* of God; for as the glory of God conspicuously shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ, every one of his glorious attributes is manifested in him. The *love* of God is so

peculiarly one of his divine attributes that it may almost be said to be himself, for "God is love;" and surely of all others this attribute was specially manifested in the gift of his dear Son. Did not our Lord himself say, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?" (John 3:16.) And so testifies holy John, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10.) Would we then view by faith the love of God; would we receive it, embrace it, realise it, and enjoy it, it must be as beholding it gloriously shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ.

3. But view next the *grace* of God, for he is "the God of all *grace*" (1 Pet. 5:10); and it is "the *grace* of God that bringeth salvation." (Titus 2:11.) But what is grace? It literally signifies "favour." Thus, when we read of Noah finding grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8); and when the Lord said to Moses, "Thou hast found grace in my sight" (Exodus 33:12), it means that they had found favour in his eyes. Now there is nothing in us to draw forth the favour of God. We are like Ruth in the field of Boaz, in whom there was nothing naturally attractive, which made her therefore say, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing that I am a stranger?" (Ruth 2:10.) There were many maidens in Israel fairer and more engaging than this Moabitish widow; but Ruth was the woman who won his favour. But this grace or favour of God shines conspicuously forth in the face and person of Jesus Christ; for in him, and in him alone, God can be gracious. There is no favour for any out of Christ. Out of Jesus all is wrath, condemnation, and terror, for out of him our sins and the justice of God angrily meet.

4. But in a similar way, the *mercy* of God shines forth

gloriously in the Person or face of Jesus Christ. Mercy is a peculiar attribute of God. It lay, so to speak, buried in the bosom of God until the fall of man. His justice was known before; for it was signalled in the banishment of the sinning angels from "their own habitation;" but his mercy first came to light in the garden where man sinned and fell. Mercy is suitable only to criminals; but the mercy of God, though it has respect to criminals, though it is mingled with the tenderest compassion for unworthy wretches, yet has this peculiar feature attached to it, that it must be in the strictest harmony with every righteous attribute of the Almighty. It must not, therefore, be weak mercy—mercy to the injury of justice; for justice might well complain if the criminal were pardoned, and no satisfaction made to its righteous demands. If the Queen to-morrow, by an act of royal favour, were to set open all the prison doors and let loose upon the country all the criminals who are now in penal servitude, it might be an act of mercy. But would it be an act of justice to the rest of the community? Would there not be a general outcry from Caithness to Cornwall at such an act of royal clemency? Let loose all the criminals! Are robbers and murderers, men stained with and ready for every crime, to be let loose upon society? Well might justice lift up her voice and hands against a demonstration of mercy, by which every righteous law would be trampled upon, and society itself almost go to wreck. How could we walk the streets in safety if garotters might go unpunished? How lie peaceably in our beds if robbers may break into our houses with impunity, as secure of the Queen's mercy? So unless Justice have her due as well as mercy, she might lift up her hands in the holy place and cry out against a display of mercy to guilty criminals, which would be an outrage against her righteous demands. But through the constitution of the glorious Person of Immanuel, God with us: through his bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and making full atonement for them,

justice suffered no wrong, the holiness of God endured no loss.

5. And what a display, too of *power!* How this attribute of the Almighty shines forth in the constitution of the glorious Person of our blessed Lord! What power was needed to rescue man from the awful state of misery and condemnation into which he had been cast! What power to raise up a spotless humanity out of the womb of a sinful Virgin! What power to uphold our gracious Lord all through his sojourning in this vale of tears! What power to hold him up on the cross when he was enduring all the wrath of the Almighty, and bearing on his suffering head all that intolerable load of guilt which but for that power would have overwhelmed him in the deep waters! And what power to raise him from the grave, into which he mystically and visibly sank, under the curse of the law and the transgressions of his people; I say "mystically and visibly," that is, to the human eye, because our Lord had finished the work which the Father gave him to do before he gave up the ghost; but, as death was a part of the sacrifice, it was needful for him to die that "by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." (Heb. 9:15.)

This, then, is the treasure—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"—light given to us to see it, life given to us to feel it, knowledge given to us to apprehend it. By this light shining into the heart; by this life felt in the soul; by this knowledge communicated to the understanding, the veil of ignorance and unbelief is taken away; and as the veil is taken away, we behold with unveiled face as in a glass the glory of the Lord. The "glass" is the glass of the gospel, which is a revelation of the love, grace, and mercy of God in his dear Son; and as this gospel is made

unto us "the power of God unto salvation," and comes into the heart "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," it gives us to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This treasure, then, is a spiritual, saving, experimental knowledge of the gospel as revealing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and to possess this light, life, and knowledge in our own bosom is to possess the treasure for ourselves.

II.—But I pass on to show—for this is a most important point—*how this treasure is communicated*. If a poor man were to go into a bank with a £100 or a £1,000 note, which he wished to be exchanged immediately for gold, a suspicion might arise, and a just one, in the minds of the managers how he came into possession of so large a sum. "How did you get this note, my man? Is it your own?" The man is known to be poor, and not to have been able to earn so great a sum; no tidings have reached the bank of any such money left him by legacy. Suspicion at once arises whether he may not have stolen it, or come in some dishonest way into unlawful possession of it. So in grace. You speak of the light and knowledge which you have of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; you talk very boldly and confidently as if you really had been put into possession of this heavenly treasure; and you offer your note to us for acceptance. You bring it before the church of God, lay it down upon the counter, and say, "This is my money. Give me credit for it." Is it not then a legitimate question to ask you, "How came you into possession of this large sum? Have you stolen it, or have you earned it? Was it given you, or have you found it?" Now I will show the way, the only way, by which it is lawfully and honestly possessed. And, first, it cannot be *earned*. No poor man could earn a thousand pounds. He has no capital; and no amount of labour, at least in this country, could enable him to get together so large a sum. That is utterly set

aside in this country and in the present state of society. And surely in a higher sense our nature is too impoverished to earn a sum which shall make us rich for eternity. Then if it cannot be earned, it must be either stolen or given. *Stolen* will never suit the conscience of a child of God, for he knows that the heart-searching God will never accept robbery for burnt offering. It must then be *given* him, if he is put into real possession of it. And is not this the testimony of God all through the Scripture? Is not "every good gift and every perfect gift from above, and does it not come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning?" (James 1:17.) So it is with this heavenly treasure. God is its divine Author and Giver. And so testifies the apostle in the words of our text: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

i. The apostle here takes us back to the first day of creation, and uses the work of God there as a figurative representation of the way in which he is pleased to communicate the light of the knowledge of his own glory to the soul. Let us look at that figure and see how it bears upon our subject. What was this earth before the creative fiat of the Almighty went forth? A dark, confused, and lifeless chaos. We therefore, read that "the earth was without form and void," and that "darkness was upon the face of the deep." At this primeval period earth is represented as a mighty deep, and gross, thick, and palpable darkness covering all its face. This we may take not only as a description of the face of the earth, but also as a typical representation of the heart of man, without form and void; a mighty deep, ever tossing to and fro its restless waves, but darkness resting upon its face; without light to see God, without life to feel his power or presence; without any spiritual acquaintance with him whom to know, is life

eternal. But now comes an almighty change. God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." In that sublime expression is revealed the way in which God was first pleased to command light to break forth at his almighty fiat. With light, and, as if for a moment preceding it, came life; for we read, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The word "moved" there signifies literally the brooding of a bird over its nest. It is the same word as is used in Deuteronomy of the eagle when she "*fluttereth* over her young." (Deut. 32:11.) So the Spirit of God is described in the book of Genesis as brooding, or moving with tremulous motion over the face of the waters, to infuse life into chaos and impregnate earth with a living energy, as the eagle mother communicates warmth to her nest by her tremulous movements over her callow brood. Thus in the first creation light and life broke forth as if simultaneously at the command of God. In the same moment that light issued forth at his creative fiat, the Spirit of God moved with impregnating energy upon the face of the waters, communicating life and vitality to the dead mass. So in grace, light and life flow forth at the command of the Almighty; for the same God who in creation commanded the light to shine out of darkness, by the same act of sovereign power and the same display of creative energy, shines into the dark hearts of his people; and with the light that breaks into their dark minds come at the same moment the quickening operations of the Holy Ghost, who moves over their heart with his life-giving energy, as in ancient times he moved with creative power upon the face of the waters.

But let us now look at this a little more closely, for it deeply concerns our spiritual welfare, and may well lead us to self-examination, whether we have been put into possession by the Lord himself of this heavenly treasure?

1. We see, first, in it *an act of divine sovereignty*. Was it not altogether a sovereign act in the Almighty Creator to bid light to come in a moment, to illuminate the dark scene when the earth was without form and void? What a transition from the blackest darkness, for the darkness was not then, as now, tempered and mingled with scattered beams of light, but utter blackness—what a transition from the blackness of darkness to that burst of light when, to use the expression in Job, "it brake forth as if it had issued out of the womb"—"the womb of the morning." (Job 38:8; Psa. 110:3.) Could chaos with its dark and rolling waters—that wild, waste scene of confusion and death—ever have commanded light out of the firmament of heaven? Without this sovereign act of God, it must ever have been what it originally was, empty and void, a dark, dead thing, an interminable scene of vanity and confusion. So is it an act of divine sovereignty for God to shine into the sinner's heart—as much an act of divine sovereignty as when in the first creation of all things he caused the day-spring to know its place. What has a sinner done; what can a sinner do to command divine light and life to burst upon his soul? Is he not as empty and as void, as dark and as dead as primeval chaos?

2. But again, it is an act of almighty *power*. Who but the Almighty could create light? What created being, let him be the highest angel or burning seraph before the throne, could by one word have formed out of nothing that all glorious, all diffused, all penetrating effulgence which we cannot describe, but which we daily see filling air, and earth, and sea with a blaze of glory, and which we call "light?" So nothing but the power of the Almighty can give light to those who sit in darkness and in the very shadow of death. For it is as impossible for a sinner, buried in the darkness of the Adam fall, to give light to his own soul by the exertion of his own powers, as it would have been for chaos to bring forth light

out of its dark bosom by the continual heaving of its tumultuous waves.

3. And yet what an act of *grace!* In primeval creation what had earth done to call forth the light of day? What good work had chaos wrought to bring down upon the face of the waters the impregnating life and quickening energy of the Holy Spirit? Can darkness create light? Can death create life? Can sin create holiness? Can enmity create love? Can misery create mercy? It may lay a foundation for it, but can no more create it than hell can create heaven, or a devil make an angel. How, then, can a sinner raise up light and life in his own bosom? Surely it must be not only a sovereign act of Almighty power, but one of special favour, if when a sinner has been rebelling against God with well nigh every breath; when all his days he has been doing things that God abhors, living at best a life of vanity and sin, if not of open ungodliness, it should please the Almighty to communicate divine light and life to his soul.

ii. But look at this communication of divine light and life in another point of view. We have seen the *sovereignty, power, and freeness* of the gift; let us now look at the *manner* of its communication. Judging from its effects, I think we may divide it into three different periods: for I do not believe that the fulness of gospel light shines all at once into the heart. On the other hand, we find both from scripture and experience that there is a gradual increase or growth of this light; for "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. 4:18.) There is, I think, some analogy between the communication of this light in nature and in grace. You will bear in mind that light, as light, was created before the sun; for in creation, the first command was, "Let there be light," which was the first day's work. But the sun was not created till the fourth

day. So in grace, there is first the creation of light in the soul. This is as it were the opening beam; the breaking up of the darkness of unregeneracy: the communication of that divine light whereby we see light in God's light. But what do we see in this light, for bear in mind that the sun is not yet risen; and thus for us, in a sense, is not yet created? We cannot, then, see the sun, for to us it does not shine. But what do we see as thus dimly revealed? Our lost, ruined condition; the holiness and justice of God in a broken covenant; our just condemnation as guilty sinners before his awful tribunal; the thorough helplessness and impotency that is in us to deliver ourselves from the wrath to come; the curse and condemnation of the law, every commandment of which we have broken in thought, or word, or deed; and all this attended with a deep conviction that if we are sent to hell we only reap the just desert of our grievous crimes. Was there not something analogous to this in the first creation? When light first shone upon the world, what did it reveal? The dark waters of a troubled chaos. Creation in its beauty and glory had not yet begun. The sun was not shining then in the sky, nor the moon ruling by night; no vegetation clothed the fields; no grass, nor herb, nor tree had sprung out of the dust; no animals roamed the forest, no fish swam in the waters, no birds flew above the earth in the firmament of heaven. The light discovered nothing but the waters of a troubled chaos; and yet as impregnated by the energy of the Spirit of God they were waving with living movement and power. So when divine light comes into the soul, it reveals our lost, ruined condition, as the primeval light beamed upon, and discovered the heaving waves of a troubled yet empty chaos. But this primeval light would also reveal the firmament above, as well as the dark waters beneath. So the first shining in of divine light reveals the glory of God in a broken law above as well as our lost condition below.

2. But now comes a further creation. On the fourth day the sun was created and set in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth. But the creation of the sun did not necessarily imply that immediately it rose upon the earth. We know that before it rises to gladden all nature there is a gradual approach of its rays, making what we call twilight or the *dawn of day*. This seems to be what Peter speaks of when he bids us take heed "to the more sure word of prophecy, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." (2 Pet. 1:19.) Thus, before the Lord fully shines into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, there is the dawning of an opening morn. This is usually some gracious discovery of the way of salvation through Christ; some opening up of the word with power, sweetness, and savour to the heart, whereby it is received in faith, hope, and love as the truth of God, exceedingly suitable to our lost condition; some blessed refreshment from the presence of the Most High; and a bowing and bending of the whole soul, putting it, as it were, into a waiting attitude to look out for a clearer and fuller revelation of Christ.

When, then, there is some discovery of salvation in the Person and work of Jesus—not indeed sufficiently strong to bring full deliverance from guilt: to manifest the pardon of sin: to discover a saving interest in the blood of the Lamb; but a light shining upon the way of salvation, upon the doctrines of grace, upon the truth as it is in Jesus, and this received into a believing heart by the life-giving power of the Spirit—this we may call the *dawn of day*, "the day-spring from on high, which gives light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace." (Luke 1:78, 79.) By this day-dawn a good measure of encouragement is felt in the soul to see that there is a way

of escape; that all is not wrath; that there is salvation to be obtained through the blood of the Lamb. This gives sweet encouragement to watch and wait for more light; it draws forth faith and prayer; it brings the soul to lie at mercy's footstool, to knock at wisdom's door in the hope that in due time the Lord will open.

But next comes "*the day-star.*" We often see soon after dawn a bright spot shining in the sky, and hanging as it were between earth and heaven;—this is the day-star, the harbinger of the sun. It is called the day-star because it is a star not of the night, but one seen in the light of the opening day. Thus there is usually a day-star in the experience of a living soul, shining brightly in the opening dawn of day; for you will observe there is a difference between the dawn and the day-star. The dawn is as if a general diffused light, spreading itself over the eastern sky. This resembles the illumination of the spiritual understanding by the diffusion of gospel light in the heart. But the day-star shines as a bright spot of light in the very midst of the day-dawn. In grace, then, this may be interpreted as significant of some bright evidence, shining as if in a conspicuous manner in the light of life diffused in the heart. Thus, the application of some promise to the soul with divine power; the bringing into the heart of some invitation with peculiar savour and sweetness; some answer to prayer; some whisper of mercy breathed into the soul as from the mouth of God; some intimation, almost amounting to an assurance, that the Lord will be gracious; some very special season of liberty and access upon our knees; some blessing to soften and melt the heart under the preached word; these and similar manifestations of the Lord's goodness and mercy may be compared to "*the day-star.*" For with this day-star there is almost always some discovery of Christ as the Sun of righteousness, though still, if I may use the expression, himself below the horizon. Have

you never observed that, together with the day-star, and illuminating it with its bright beams—for the day-star itself derives all its light from the sun—the beams of the sun shoot themselves upward from beneath the horizon, though the glorious orb of day himself has not yet risen in his beauty and splendour?

3. But now comes the third stage of God's shining into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the *rising of the Sun*—that blessed experience of the soul of which the prophet speaks: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2.) Blessed is the day-star; and sweet is its appearing as the sure herald of the rising sun. But as the sun outshines the day-star, so does the full light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ outshine the first discovery of mercy in a promise; for this is the revelation of Christ to the soul in the glory of his divine Person at the right hand of the Father; and with this comes a discovery of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, and what he is as the Christ of God, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. This glorious discovery of the King in his beauty is the full shining in of the perfect day, which gives the clearest and brightest light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But bear in mind that all the way through, from the first dawn to "the light of the morning when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds" (2 Sam. 23:4), it is only in God's light we see light; and that this light, though it varies in degree, is still the same in kind and in what it manifests. Thus when the light of life first begins to dawn upon the soul, we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, though, like the weak and tender babe, we see light and scarcely know what it is we see. And yet we know it is distinct from everything we have seen and felt

before. When the dawn still spreads, and "the day-star" of promise arises in the heart, it is still the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; though we cannot call that grace and that glory ours beyond sweet hope, which however firmly anchors in them. But when the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in his wings, and shines in glorious splendour upon the soul, then there is, at least whilst it lasts, the full light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Then Jesus Christ is seen to shine forth in all the splendour of Godhead. His eternal Sonship, as the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his Person, is seen by the eye of faith, believed in, loved, and adored. His Deity, as one with the Father and the Holy Ghost in a perfect equality of Essence shines resplendently into the heart, and he is worshipped as the only true God. His once suffering humanity, as bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, but now resplendent with ineffable glory, is seen to shine forth in union with his eternal Deity, making him a suitable Mediator between God and man; for in the Mediator God draws near to man and brings man near to God. As God, our blessed Lord is equal with God; as man he is one with man. Thus as God he stands in the presence of God as one with God; as man, he came down into the presence of man as one with man; and as God-man, he now stands in the presence of God to intercede for man.

As then these divine and blessed realities are received by faith, in the glorious discovery of them through their revelation in Christ, there is communicated to the soul the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The face of Jesus Christ is seen, and the glory of God is seen in him. The pity, compassion, love, mercy, and grace of God are all viewed by the eye of faith as shining gloriously forth in the face of Jesus Christ; for God's face itself cannot

be seen. No man can see him and live. (Exodus 33:20.) "He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see." But he is seen in the face of Jesus Christ; for "he that hath seen him hath seen the Father." (John 14:9.) He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and though "no man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." (John 1:18.)

Now, the shining in of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ takes the veil of ignorance and unbelief from off the heart. The apostle therefore says that "we all with open (or, as the word should have been translated, "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The glass of which he speaks is the glass of the gospel; for it is in it that the glory of the Lord is reflected. As, then, in the glass of the gospel, as shone upon by the rays of the Spirit, we behold by faith the glory of the Lord, there is a being "changed into the same image." This is an allusion to the appearance of the face of Moses, which was changed into the image of the glory which he beheld on Sinai's top. So, as in the glass of the gospel, the soul beholds the glory of the Lord, there is that gracious and glorious influence communicated by the Spirit of the Lord, by which it is "transformed in the renewing of the mind," "from glory to glory;" that is, from the glory of the Lord without to his glorious image within, or from one degree of gracious apprehension of his glory to another sensible reception of it.

III. But having seen *what* the treasure is, and *how* it is communicated, we will, with God's help and blessing, consider now *the place* in which it has pleased God to lodge it. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." O what an unfit casket, as we might hastily judge, for such a heavenly

jewel; but stop, hasty reason; suspend thy rash judgment. It is a casket in which the only wise God has seen fit for a time to lodge it. And is not that enough? Must not infinite wisdom have devised the casket as well as the treasure? Let us seek to justify this wisdom.

1. First, then, bear in mind that whatever the casket be, it cannot impair the *beauty* of the treasure. In the tombs of Etruria, there have been found at different times some of the most beautiful jewellery ever made by the fingers of man. In the beauty of the stones, in the excellence of the workmanship, in the harmony of the colours, in the artistic taste displayed throughout, putting to the blush all modern jewellery, there have been found jewels deposited for more than 2,000 years in the closest contact with the dust of death; for they were probably attached to the neck or arms of the corpse as they had been worn in life. But when found they came forth untarnished, unsullied, so that it is said they have been worn on the same evening on the neck of a Roman Princess. Whatsoever, then, the place may be where the treasure is lodged, however unfit it may seem to hold it, it does not sully its purity and beauty.

2. Nor does it in the slightest degree diminish its *value*. When the man in the parable found the treasure buried in the field, the clods of clay underneath where the treasure lay had not diminished the value of the gold. The Bank of England cellars, where the bullion lies in millions, are doubtless dark and gloomy enough; but all their gloom and darkness do not take away a farthing from the value of the money there lodged. If, then, God has seen fit to lodge a treasure that makes us rich for eternity in what the Holy Ghost here calls "an earthen vessel," the meanness of the casket does not impair the lustre, nor detract from the intrinsic value of the jewel.

ii. But what is meant by the expression "earthen vessels?" Four things may be intimated thereby.

1. First, the *original nature* of the base material. God made man out of the dust of the earth: "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." Our bodies, then, which are here spoken of, are made of clay, and therefore the *very body itself* in which the immortal soul is lodged—a soul enriched for eternity by heavenly treasure—is an earthen vessel. Common was the substance, earthy the clay out of which the body was in the first instance created; and what was in its original nature mean and low, sin has debased beneath its native material. As the body exercises great influence over the mind, we find that our souls often cleave to the dust. This was David's feeling and confession, "My soul cleaveth to the dust" (Psal. 119:25), and must often be ours; for as our bodies are earthy, so our affections as influenced by them often grovel in the very dust of death. It is true that this does not sully or diminish the value of the heavenly treasure which is in the new man of grace; but we daily carry about with us the saddest proof that our bodies are but bodies of gross and vile clay.

2. But our bodies, as being of this earthy material, are, secondly, extremely *frail and fragile*. How soon a blow by what is called an accident—a tile, for instance, falling from a roof, might lay these earthly bodies in dust! How some lingering disease or sudden stroke of apoplexy might by a longer or shorter course lay our clay house in its last resting place. In many instances how specially frail is the body of the saint of God; for the Lord often makes him feel how soon he may be dislodged from his house of clay by sending sickness into his frame, allowing pain and aches to remind him of his mortality, or taking down his earthly tabernacle pin by pin, before the whole tent falls into its native dust.

3. Again, how *unseemly* in the eyes of men are the saints of God. An earthen vessel, especially one made to be buried in the ground, is not a pleasing object: the material is coarse and the workmanship rough. It is not a splendid china, or beautiful porcelain vase, fit for the palace of kings or the cherished treasures of a national museum, but a rough, coarse vessel, such as is used for the commonest purposes. And yet this coarse vessel made of the commonest clay and the roughest manufacture might contain a priceless treasure. Persons who hoard money are fond sometimes of lodging it in the most out-of-the-way and least suspected places. Thus there might be buried in some hole in a garden a rough, coarse, earthen vessel, say an old flower pot. It might be cracked across by accident or by the weight of the earth, and yet it might hold a thousand sovereigns. Now if that pot were placed before your eyes, you would see only the worthlessness and frailty of the material; for you could not penetrate through the coarse, mean, and perhaps dirty walls to see the treasure within. So the saints of God walk abroad in their houses of clay, carrying in their bosom an immortal treasure. God has enriched them with the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and thus given them a treasure for eternity; but they are in the eyes of men mere earthen vessels; so that we may truly say of them, "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter." (Lam. 4:2.) Many of them are very poor in this world's good; others are despised for want of shining abilities; others are mean in outward appearance, so as to cut very little figure amongst the high-born, the polished, and the beautiful; and others, from natural weakness of intellect (for the Lord's people often do not shine there), are scarcely able to comport themselves as men of this world do in trade or business, and therefore draw upon themselves

additional contempt. But even apart from this consideration, grace never gained favour in the eyes of a worldling: he has not eyes to see its beauty, nor a heart to admire, it, could he even see it.

4. But there is a fourth idea connected with the expression—that the vessel is sometimes *leaky*. As the apostle speaks in the Epistle to Hebrews, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip:" (*margin*—"run out as leaking vessels;" Heb. 2:1.) How leaky, in many instances, is the mind and memory! How rarely you can carry home the contents of a sermon, or perhaps any one part of it. Whilst you are hearing it, you think you will remember and meditate upon it: but alas! it is all gone before you cross the threshold of your house, and sometimes almost before you leave the threshold of the house of God.

Now why should these things be? Why should the treasure be deposited in a vessel so coarse in material, so rough in manufacture, so unseemly in appearance, and often so cracked and leaky? The reason is given us in the last clause of our text, and one sufficient to answer every objection. It is to *display the mighty power of God*.

IV.—"That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

O the wondrous depths of Almighty wisdom, for God thus to secure all the glory to himself! If the casket were comparable to the jewel, how the eyes of men would admire the saints of God! How they would see the glory of God shining forth in them! One day it will be so. One day these earthly bodies will be raised up incorruptible, and shine forth gloriously in all the splendour of their full conformity to the glorified body of

Christ. The immortal soul and the glorified body will one day be fit companions, and the bodies of the saints will shine forth in all the glory in which Christ appeared when transfigured upon Tabor's top. But now it is not God's will that it should be so, that he may have all the glory. If we could be what we wish to be in spiritual moments, our carnal mind would take advantage of it to puff us up with spiritual pride; we should be drawn aside from a sense of our weakness, sinfulness, and helplessness, and stand before God and man as Lucifer stood in that fearful moment when pride entered his heart, and he was hurled from heaven's battlements into the abyss of hell. Therefore, that the excellency of the power in keeping the treasure from being spilt; in preserving the fear of God alive in the heart; in upholding faith and hope and love and every spiritual grace; in maintaining our standing in the midst of a thousand foes and fears—that the excellency of this Almighty power may be of God and not of us, it has pleased the Lord to lodge the treasure of his grace in an earthen vessel. And observe the force and beauty of the expression, "the *excellency* of the power!" It is not ordinary power, but power so surpassing, power so glorious, power so worthy of all the perfections of God, that his own divine excellency is impressed upon it with the brightest lustre.

Be not surprised, therefore, if you feel that in yourself you are but an earthen vessel; if you are made deeply and daily sensible unto what a frail body God has communicated divine light and life. Be not surprised if your clay house is often tottering; if sickness sometimes assails your mortal tabernacle; if in your flesh there dwelleth no good thing; if your soul often cleaves to the dust; and if you are unable to retain a sweet sense of God's goodness and love. Be not surprised nor startled at the corruptions of your depraved nature, at the depth of sin in your carnal mind; at the vile

abominations which lurk and work in your deceitful and desperately wicked heart. Bear in mind that it is the will of God that this heavenly treasure which makes you rich for eternity should be lodged in an earthen vessel. We are to carry about a daily sense of our base original to hide pride from our eyes. We are to be despised by others, and by none so much as by our own selves. We have ever to feel our native weakness, and that without Christ we can do nothing; that we may be clothed with humility, and feel ourselves the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints. We thus learn to prize the heights, breadths, lengths, and depths of the love of Christ, who stooped so low to raise us up so high.

But all these humbling considerations and feelings will be made to work together for our spiritual good. We shall learn experimentally and feelingly from them—the only true way of learning—that Christ's strength is made perfect in weakness; we shall ascribe all our salvation and sanctification to the power of God; we shall give all the glory to him to whom glory belongs; we shall be willing for a few weeks or months or years to "bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our body;" nay, we shall be reconciled to have the heavenly treasure in our earthen vessel, in the sweet hope that when the vessel is broken and its contents shed by the iron hand of death, the treasure will not be lost, but that it will be borne on high to be safe in the bosom of God till we shall be clothed upon with a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. If blessed with this faith and hope, we shall be reconciled to death and the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, in the blessed persuasion that a glorious body awaits us in the resurrection morn; and that when the glorified body and the glorified soul are re-united, they will meet and embrace each other with mutual joy, and so we shall be for ever with the Lord.