

ISRAEL BLEST AND KEPT

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"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Num. 6:24-26

I once heard this text adduced as an argument for a form of prayer. It was argued that there could be no intrinsic objection to forms of prayer, seeing that God Himself had prescribed a distinct formula in the words of the text. But if that argument were valid in one point, it would be in others; and upon the same ground we might set up the whole of the Jewish ritual, and bring back circumcision and sacrifice. The spirit of the New Testament is not one of forms. These might suit the old ceremonial law, but are alien to the new covenant dispensation. Prayer is not a lip-liturgy, but a heart-breathing; and flows, not from a prayer-book, but from the Spirit of grace and supplications. I no more believe that when Paul prayed with the elders at Ephesus his prayers were made for him beforehand, than that their tears and kisses were manufactured to order. Nor do I believe that when he prayed on the sands with the disciples at Tyre he prayed out of a book, any more than that when he preached at Troas until midnight he preached a written sermon. The Spirit of grace and supplications, which intercedes for us and in us with groanings which cannot be uttered, supersedes all forms; and if He cannot make intercession for us according to the will of God, it cannot be done by a collect or a litany.

Two things are worthy of notice before we come to our text.

1. First, that the blessing was put into the mouth of Aaron, the high priest: "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them" (Num. 6:22, 23). Aaron in this, as in other points, was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great High Priest over the house of God. But Aaron could only pronounce the blessing, Jesus gives it. Words only fall from the lips of a man; blessings fall from the heart of the God-Man.

2. But, secondly, we may observe how by implication that fundamental, cardinal doctrine of our most holy faith, the Trinity, is here set forth. Observe in the text the triple use of the word Jehovah: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Why this triple repetition, except upon the same ground that the seraphim in the temple three times proclaimed, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts?"

I. *"The Lord bless thee."* The high priest could only use the words; he pronounced the prayer, but he could not give that which was contained in the prayer. It was therefore not such a blessing as the Pope claims to give, but such a blessing as a poor sinner might ask; not a magical incantation to charm away sin, but a humble petition of one himself compassed with infirmity. The key to the words, "The Lord bless thee," is, I believe, to be found in Eph. 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" for the blessings prayed for in our text would seem to be chiefly spiritual blessings. Not that we are to think lightly of temporal favours. They are left-hand blessings, if not right-hand mercies; they are gifts to be thankful for on earth, if not graces that take to heaven; provision for the perishing

body, if not food for the immortal soul. Health, strength, such a measure of worldly goods as shall keep the wolf from the door, and enable us to owe no man anything but love; children growing up to be a comfort to their parents; a kind and affectionate partner; warm and faithful friends; an untarnished name; and a little provision for those dear and near to us, that their tears over our body may not be doubly embittered by poverty and dependence; who shall say that these are not blessings for which God is to be praised? Viewed by the eye of faith, blessings in providence come down from heaven steeped in mercy. And yet how short, O how infinitely short, do these temporal blessings, which perish in the using, fall of spiritual blessings, which endure for evermore! A striking proof of this is that when we are privileged to draw near to a throne of grace with some measure of faith and feeling, the heart's desire is wholly towards spiritual blessings; and the eye of the soul is so wholly and solely fixed upon them, that there is scarcely left place either in the heart or lips to ask for any other.

Let us, then, as the Lord may enable, look at a few of these. They are indeed innumerable, and scattered up and down God's Word in such rich profusion, that we can glean up but a few. Like the trees in Paradise, so laden with promised mercies are the Scriptures, that we can but gather a cluster here and there. To gather the whole crop, that hangs so richly and luxuriantly from the boughs of promise, is beyond our power, as beyond our grasp. Yet a few we may safely gather.

1. *Godly fear* in the heart, that fountain of life by which an awakened sinner departs from the snares of death, is not that a blessing? and of all blessings first and foremost, because the "beginning of wisdom?" When, then, the priest spoke the words, "The Lord bless thee," may we not well

believe he was to hold in his hand this blessing of godly fear, to drop, not only from his mouth, but also from the heart of God into the souls of the people prayed for? It is indeed such a blessing that there is no other blessing without it; for though it is "the beginning of wisdom," it is also "the principal part" of it (Prov. 1:7, margin). It is, therefore, not a bud which drops off the bough, but one which expands into flower and ripens into fruit; it is not a limb which is dwarfed and stunted by the other limbs that surround it, but one which grows with their growth and strengthens with their strength. It is the companion of faith, the friend of hope, and the partner of love; it makes the conscience tender, the walk circumspect, and the life consistent. It is "a fountain of life," and, like a river, is only increased and deepened by successive additions of grace. Let us never think we possess any spiritual blessing if our heart be destitute of godly fear. If we have not the beginning, we can have neither the middle nor end.

2. But is not *faith* a blessing too? O how rich a blessing! And *who* know faith to be a blessing? Those who are deeply exercised and tried by an unbelieving heart. None prize the blessedness of faith when given so much as those who have had, and still have, painful struggles with a heart that cannot, nay, that will not believe. When faith comes down from heaven as a good and perfect gift into such a heart, when it leaps into the soul over such dark and rugged mountains of unbelief and infidelity, it is felt to be a blessing by the sweet effects it produces. We read that "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich." This is especially true of faith, for it is an enriching grace, putting the soul into possession of all the riches of the kingdom of heaven. It is almost as if the Governor and Directors of the Bank of England took you into the Bank cellars, and said, "You may take as much bullion as your eyes can look upon, or your hands carry away;" for faith

gives such a blessed introduction into the treasures of God's grace, that it may have all it can grasp, and the more it grasps the better. But this is not often the soul's privilege. When God says, "Take," faith may embrace as much of Christ's riches as its eye can see or its hands grasp. But these are rare seasons. Too often are we like the penniless pauper who walks by the Bank, but to whom its cellars are closed, and all entrance effectually barred.

3. And is not *hope* a blessing too? I scarcely know how it is, but in our day this hope, which is spoken of so much in Scripture, which is termed an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast, which is called "a good hope through grace," and placed by the apostle side by side and as if on a level with faith and love—this blessed grace of hope seems little thought of, and almost despised and set aside. One of the strangest and most inconsistent features of the present day is the combination of the strongest confidence with the greatest carnality. Never was there so much assurance, and never so little real faith; never so much stout word, and never so little ripe fruit; never so much high profession, and never so much low practice. If these high and lofty professors were tried by sin, Satan, and by a desponding heart; if they did more business in deep waters, they would more prize the anchor. But when the ship is always in harbour, moored on to the quay till masts and timbers rot, the anchor is not wanted, and is therefore little thought of. It is being buffeted by wind and wave, and being in continual peril of shipwreck, that makes the anchor prized.

4. But what shall we say of *love*? Shall we pass by that greatest of all blessings, which abides when faith is lost in sight, and hope absorbed in enjoyment? Shall we think little of that grace which is glory in the bud, the earnest of heaven, the choicest gift of God, as most assimilating the

soul to His own nature, for God is love? It is the richest blessing in the whole cluster; the sweetest grace which God has to bestow; without which heaven would be no happiness, salvation no joy, and immortality no bliss.

5. But are there no other blessings? Have we now come to an end? Are we like a person who has a small income, a few shillings per week, and when Thursday evening comes finds all spent, nothing left to go to market with on Saturday? God is no such niggardly bestower of His bounties. He does not dole out His mercies like a parish officer, or treat His children like the poor needlewomen; "He giveth liberally and upbraideth not." Shall we omit patience? "Let patience have her perfect work." We read of those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises;" and if we have many trials, sufferings, and exercises, we shall not easily do without this blessing of patience and submission to God's will. It will serve us in good stead one day, even if we seem not to need it now.

6. And shall we pass by blessed testimonies of God's mercy and grace to the soul; views of the King in His beauty, and of the land that is very far off; wells of consolation in the valley of Baca; Ebenezers set up in the wilderness? Shall we omit crumbs from the bread of life, and drops from the everlasting fountain? Can anything not be a blessing which God gives? He gives no little favours; the least of His favours is but a pledge and foretaste of the greatest. When you send your child to school in the morning, and give it a kiss, it is but a little; but it speaks the love of a parent's heart. But all your love is not spent in that one kiss; you have plenty more left, for you have a heart full of affection. Thus if the Lord is pleased to drop a kiss into the soul, are there no more to come? Has that one kiss exhausted all His love? "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." The bride wanted more

than one; for the kisses of His mouth were but the language of His loving heart.

7. But are there no other blessings than these? Is not the rod often a blessing? God's frown often a blessing? His stripping hand often a blessing? His rebukes in the conscience often a blessing? The hidings of His face, the withdrawals of His sensible favour, the stripes of His heavy hand; shall we say these are no blessings? They are, though they are to our feelings blessings in disguise.

But before we pass on, just look at the personality of the blessing asked: "The Lord bless *thee*," not "*you*." And yet when the high priest pronounced the blessing he did not fix his eye upon, nor did he address his speech to, any one individual. It was spoken to the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel; and yet the words were so framed as though the blessing was for each individual. Such are God's blessings—personal, individual. Gracious souls, sometimes, when they have heard the word with any particular sweetness or power, say, "It was all for me." Well, it was all for thee; but art thou the only "me" in the place? Might not someone sitting by thy side say, "It was all for me?" Don't think that one alone is to be blessed, and all others excluded. There is enough for each and there is enough for all. But there is something so singularly appropriating in the mercy of God when brought into the heart that it seems as though it was for me and for me alone. But here is the blessedness of the mercies of God, of the riches of His grace and glory—that one having a part does not deprive the other. It is not like a natural family, where each successive child seems to withdraw a portion of the inheritance from the others; so that, if they had the covetous feelings of up-grown people, the elder might well say to the new-born babe, "We don't want thee, thou little robber! Why art thou come to cry

halves with us?" It does not narrow the heavenly inheritance that there are so many to enjoy it; if it did, it would narrow God Himself, for God is their inheritance, and in God is enough to satisfy myriads of elect angels, as well as myriads of ransomed men. There need be no envy in the things of God; it is excluded by the freeness, fulness, and richness of God's love. But I must not spend all the evening upon my first four words.

II. *"And keep thee."* Blessing first and keeping afterwards. The blessing given, and then, when given, the blessing kept. The letter written, and then sealed; the jewel put into the casket, and then the casket locked. "The Lord keep thee." How we need this as well as the other! And he that knows most of his own heart will prize this blessing most. We cannot keep ourselves. If a man think he can keep himself he knows nothing of the treachery and deceitfulness of his own heart.

But not to spend too much time upon this point, I would observe that there are three things, if not more, from which God's children need to be specially kept.

1. I need hardly observe that the first and foremost is to be kept from positive evil. The Lord asked of the Father for His disciples, "I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world"—no; let them suffer there as I have suffered before—"but keep them from the evil." They must be in the world, they must be brought into contact with the world, but O keep them from the evil that is in the world! And this will be first and foremost in the petitions of every child of God who knows his own evil heart and has suffered from its weakness and treachery, that the Lord will keep him from open evil, that he may bring no distress and guilt upon his own conscience or reproach upon the cause of God.

2. But another thing from which the Lord alone can keep His people is, error. Satan does not attack all alike. He knows the bent of our natural minds. Some men's animal passions are strong; in others the animal passions are comparatively weak, but there is much mental speculation. Satan does not tempt the latter as he tempts the former. The passions of the one he inflames; but it is upon the speculative mind of the other that he works. Nothing is so easy for some minds as to drink down error. Their reasoning faculties are caught by the bait of some logical argument, or their speculative imagination by some deep mystery; or their pride gratified by some wonderful piece of knowledge. Now, under all this, error is usually concealed. The sweetness of the draught hides the arsenic in the cup. But no man can take even a few grains of error with impunity; it will stupefy, if it do not kill; it will weaken the soul, if it do not at once destroy life. It will and must affect his head or his heart, his hands or his feet, his faith or his walk. No man can drink down error and the spirit of error without being injured, his spiritual strength weakened, and his spiritual limbs paralysed. We are to beware of error as we would of poison. There is something in error alluring as well as sweet to the carnal mind. Many a child has been allured by the berries of the deadly nightshade first to taste, and, when tasted, their sweetness has drawn it on largely to eat. Let error once hang down its alluring berries from the pulpit, there are plenty in the congregation to pluck and eat. Therefore beware of error, and of erroneous men. I am jealous of error in proportion as I love and value the truth.

3. But there is a third thing, perhaps more fearful still, from which the Lord's people need to be kept, a thing perhaps little thought of and little noticed, and that is, a spirit of delusion. Many, many persons are under a spirit of delusion,

whose lives are consistent and whose creed is sound. Their minds are mostly of a peculiar cast. They are not persons usually of strong animal passions, nor of speculative reasoning minds, but dreamy, visionary, imaginative, with a strong tinge of superstition and a tendency to natural enthusiasm. Now upon such minds Satan specially works, for he is a spirit, and, as such, has access to our animal spirits, breathing into them a spirit of delusion. It was thus he acted upon the four hundred prophets whom honest Micaiah withstood at the court of Ahab; and so with the damsel mentioned in the Acts as "possessed with a spirit of divination" (Acts 16:16.) The Romish Church is full of the dreams and visions, trances and revelations, of their pretended saints; the visions of their St. Catherines and St. Bridgets fill volumes. So even where a sounder creed is professed there are continually found persons all whose religion consists in dreams and sights, in whom there is neither faith nor repentance, neither a sense of sin nor a knowledge of salvation. With these "light and airy dreams," as Hart calls them, they are wonderfully elated and puffed up, and feed on them instead of the riches of Christ's blood.

How we need the Lord to keep us! We stand upon slippery places. Snares and traps are laid for us in every direction. Every employment, every profession in life, from the highest to the lowest, has its special temptations. Snares are spread for the feet of the most illiterate as well as the most highly cultivated minds; nor is there anyone, whatever his position in life may be, who has not a snare laid for him, and such a snare as will surely prove his downfall if God keep him not. When Elisha sat upon the mountain and his servant was distressed lest his master should be taken away by violence, the prophet prayed the Lord to open his servant's eyes. What then saw he? Chariots and horses of fire all round about the mountain guarding the prophet. Perhaps if the Lord were to

open our eyes as He opened the eyes of Elisha's servant, we might see devils where he saw angels, see ourselves surrounded by Beelzebub and his legions, as the eyes of the servant saw Michael with the flaming hosts of heaven. Well, then, may it be the desire of our soul, "The Lord keep me"—keep me in His providence, keep me by His grace, keep me by planting His fear deep in my soul, and maintaining that fear alive and effectual in my heart; keep me waking, keep me sleeping; keep me by night, keep me by day; keep me at home, keep me abroad; keep me with my family, and keep me with my friends; keep me in the world, and keep me in the church; the Lord keep me according to His promise every moment; keep me by His Spirit and grace with all the tenderness implied in His words, "O keep me as the apple of Thine eye!" My friends, you can know little of your own heart, little of Satan's devices, little of the snares spread for your feet, unless you feel how deeply you need an interest in this blessing: "The Lord keep thee." And He will, for we read of the righteous that they are kept "by the power of God through faith unto salvation;" and that "He will keep the feet of His saints."

III. But we pass on to the third portion of the blessing: "*The Lord make His face shine upon thee.*" The allusion here seems, to my mind, to be to the sun. Sometimes the natural sun has not risen; and the world must needs be dark if the sun be still beneath the horizon. So with many gracious souls; it is darkness with them, midnight darkness, Egyptian darkness, darkness to be felt, because at present neither the Day-star has appeared nor the Sun of Righteousness risen upon them with healing in His wings. It will and must be dark with them till the Sun rise. But sometimes after the sun has risen we see not his face: clouds, deep, dark clouds, may obscure the face of that bright luminary throughout the whole day, and we may not get a single ray from him

through the whole period that he is above the visible horizon. So many of the Lord's family, after the Sun has risen upon them in the morning of their spiritual life, may pass, perhaps, much of their subsequent time in the dark shadow, till perhaps at eveningtide there is light, and a departing ray gilds the dying pillow. But again, there are sometimes days when mists drive rapidly across the face of the bright orb of day, and yet occasionally he peeps through the breaking clouds. It has been much this weather to-day. And is not this, in some measure, an emblem of the way in which the Sun of Righteousness is continually obscured by the mists and fogs which spring up out of our unbelieving heart, hidden from view by the doubts and fears that, like the vapours of the valley, spread themselves, to our view, over His beautiful face? Yet there are times when He gleams through the clouds and disperses the mists. When the Lord is pleased to bless the soul and shine upon it with any sweet manifestation, then He breaks through the dark clouds; but they gather again. It is not in Christian experience one bright summer day. We do not live in Australia or Peru, where clouds and mists rarely obscure the face of the sun. Our spiritual climate is humid, our inward latitude northern.

"The Lord *make* His face shine upon thee." Is the Lord, then, sovereign in these matters? Can we not lift up our hand and remove the cloud? We have as much power to stretch forth our hand and sweep away the mists that obscure the Sun of Righteousness, as we have power with the same hand to sweep away a London fog. How this puts the creature into his right place! and the creature is only in his right place when he is nothing, and God is all in all. The very words seem now to be dropping with some sweetness upon my spirit: "The Lord make His face to shine upon thee." How blessed to see the face of the Father, and to see it shine! not covered with lowering clouds of justly-merited displeasure, as sometimes

we see in the natural sky an obscured sun looking angrily down, presaging wind and storm. It is indeed true that, when we have brought guilt into our consciences, the face of God is seen to lower with anger. We have brought His just displeasure upon our heads: though not angry with the persons of His people, yet is He justly angry with their sins; and a sense of this in the soul covers His face with clouds: "Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (Lam. 3:44)

"The Lord make His face shine upon thee." And if He make His face shine upon thee He will make thy face shine too. It was so with Moses, when he was in the mount and was holding sweet communion with God. When he came down amongst the people, the skin of his face shone: the glory of God was reflected upon it. And if the Lord make His face shine upon thee, it will make thy face not unlike the face of Moses when thou goest among the people of God.

IV. "*And be gracious unto thee.*" How sweet the gospel is! But what makes the gospel sweet? That one word which sheds a perfume through the whole—grace. Take grace out of the gospel and you destroy the gospel; you nullify and overthrow it; it is the gospel no more. Grace pervades every part and every branch of the blessed gospel; it is the life of the gospel; in a word, it is the gospel itself. "*Be gracious unto thee.*" In what, then, is God gracious? In a broken law? What does that know of grace? In resolutions of amendment, creature performances, and human righteousness? Can the Lord, will the Lord, show Himself gracious in these? I have read of a project for extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers. We might as well expect to make sunbeams out of cucumbers as to make grace out of the law; it is cold as cucumbers; there is no sun in it. Grace, to be grace, must come out of the gospel. It is *in* the gospel, and *out* of the

gospel must it come; and it does come, excluding all creature righteousness, putting an extinguisher upon all human merit. As the apostle argues: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6). "The Lord be gracious unto thee."

But *how* is the Lord gracious? Perhaps you have had occasion at some time of your life, to go into the presence of some one in worldly rank far your superior, and you went timid, nervous, and trembling; but you experienced what is called a "gracious reception." Did not that enable you to speak and open your petition? So it is in the things of God. A sense of our meanness and unworthiness may and does make us feel timid and trembling before the face of the Most High; but when He draws us into His presence, and receives us graciously, as king Ahasuerus received the trembling Esther, extending to her the sceptre of his grace, it emboldens the soul to lay its petition at His feet. Nothing will do it but this. But you feel and say often, "I am so unworthy." Will you ever be anything else? When do you hope to be worthy? When do you mean to be worthy? If you could be worthy to-morrow, where is your worthiness to-day? Is the old score yet paid? If you venture upon the ground of worthiness you must have the old score rubbed off before you come to the new. Worthiness! where is it? In man? Never since the day that Adam fell. Righteousness fell in Paradise; when Adam's hand touched the apple, worthiness fell to the ground, and never since has been able to raise its head. I must not, then, go to God upon the ground of worthiness. But may I go on the ground of unworthiness? I read of one who did, and met with a very gracious reception. "Lord," said one, "I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." What did the Lord say of this man? That He had not found so great faith, no, not in

Israel. What, too, was the confession of the returning prodigal? "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." But this brought out the best robe, the ring for the hand, and the shoes for the feet. Why? Faith dwells with a sense of unworthiness; they are bosom companions; it dwells in no other but unworthy breasts. Feel spiritually unworthy and you are spiritually believing, for it is faith that gives a sense of unworthiness. You believe you are unworthy; by the same faith that you believe your unworthiness you believe God's grace. "Be gracious unto thee." That melts the heart; law and terrors do but harden. It is grace that softens, grace that melts, grace that constrains, grace that produces godly obedience.

"The Lord be gracious unto thee." But *when?* In all times, states, and circumstances. "What!" the soul says, "after repeated backslidings; after daily inconsistencies; after so much ingratitude, neglect, self-seeking, pride, worldliness; so much lightness and frivolity, so little living, speaking, thinking, and acting to the glory of God?" If the Lord take notice of these things so as to rebuke us, it is well for us; but if the Lord take such notice of them as to make them entire hindrances to His grace, where shall we find a person to whom the Lord will ever be gracious? Grace must come over all the mountains of our sin and shame, and constrain us to a willing obedience, for Christ's people are made "willing in the day of His power;" and the more He is gracious unto us, the more willing we shall be to serve Him, love Him, obey Him, and walk in His blessed ways! God wants no slaves, no hired servants in His house; He is served by sons and daughters. The obedience of a son or a daughter is a willing obedience. You have seen sometimes an afflicted parent, and you have admired, perhaps, the willing services and kindnesses shown him in sickness or old age by some affectionate daughter. Suppose that daughter were continually reminding her

parent, "I do this because it is my duty. If I prop up your pillow, if I bring your medicine, if I give you food, if I attend to your wants, it is my duty; you are my parent, and I therefore show my duty to you." How could a parent receive attention from a son or a daughter who was ever throwing duty in his face? But if he saw that every movement was prompted by love; if he felt the soft hand of love propping up the pillow, the tender hand of affection giving the medicine, an affectionate smile upon the countenance, and sometimes the passing cloud of sympathy, but all connected with the deep affection of a daughter's heart, that would be received as affectionately as bestowed. Is it otherwise in the things of God? Go to God with your duty—it is only fit to be thrown back upon your face. Go to God in love, in the obedience of an affectionate heart, and you will be accepted.

V. *"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee."* The meaning of this expression may, I think, be illustrated by a simple figure. A child has been disobedient to, or otherwise displeased its parent; or, to take a somewhat tenderer relation, a wife has not been altogether to her husband what he might expect, nor shown him that kindness and affection which are his due, and which indeed it is not only her duty but her highest privilege to give. The husband's head is then sometimes hung down, his eyes are averted, and face turned away; she is not met with that cheerfully-raised countenance and gladsome eye that she is at other times greeted with. Is there not something in this figure that may give a key to the words, "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee?" When we offend a person, his face is not toward us as at other times. It was so with Laban towards Jacob; and if we have in any way incurred a friend's or superior's displeasure we watch instinctively his countenance. Is it down or up? Does it wear a frown or a smile? Is it looking upon us with the eye of affection, or are the eyes averted? We can tell in a moment if

we know the countenance. Thus is the blessing asked—"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee," as a kind and affectionate parent upon an obedient child, as a fond husband upon a loving, devoted wife; for such is God to His children—Father and Husband. And do we not, as children, often provoke Him to look upon us with frowning brow, or rather not to look upon us at all, to "hide His face," as we read, "that we cannot see Him?" The prayer then is—"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee," with a smile upon it; free, open, forgiving, merciful, and mild, that thou mayest advance therein. When a disobedient child comes home and sees its father's face not towards it as before, it shrinks away; there is no pressing forward to get upon the knee, no throwing the little arms round the neck and snatching a kiss, but a shrinking away through guilt and shame. So is it in the things of God. When conscience tells us how in this and that instance we have disobeyed, been inconsistent, transgressed, and done amiss, when we go into God's presence there is a hanging back, a shrinking away through fear of an ill reception. But O the change in the child when the frown disappears and the smile succeeds; when the little one is taken once more into the arms and the tears are kissed away! How much more so in the things of God when He kisses away the tears of the disobedient child, as in the case of the returning prodigal! There are no kisses like those kisses of forgiveness, of mercy, and of restoring grace.

VI. *"And give thee peace."* O what a blessing! As Hart says,

"I lay me down and sweetly sleep,
For I have peace with God."

It is this that makes the pillow easy in life, and will alone make that pillow easy in death—peace with God through Jesus Christ, peace through the reconciliation, peace through

the blood of sprinkling, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Many covet great things, high things. But what said the Lord to Baruch? "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Ministers often seek great gifts, great eloquence, great knowledge of mysteries, great congregations, great popularity and influence. They are wrong in seeking these so-called great things. Let them rather seek *real* things, gracious things, things that make their souls blessed here and hereafter. The blessing that the gracious soul most earnestly covets is peace; for this is the sweetest honey-drop in God's cup. It is true that it does not make the heart overflow like joy, nor to dance with exultation, like the first beaming in of the rays of hope, nor melt it down like the visits of love; but it is in some respects sweeter than all, because it so settles down the soul into sweet assurance; it is the realisation of the Saviour Himself, for "He is our peace," and may thus be called the crowning blessing.

But see how the links of this divine chain meet, somewhat like that which we were treating of last Lord's day evening. Just look at these links for a moment. "The Lord bless thee"—link the first; "and keep thee"—link the second; "the Lord make His face shine upon thee"—the third; "and be gracious unto thee"—the fourth; "the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee"—the fifth; "and give thee peace"—the sixth. Six blessed links, and all united into one continuous chain; for when the Lord begins to bless, He ends with peace. We need wish no greater nor pray for a higher blessing than peace, for God has none greater to give. When a father dies he leaves his children all his goods. Jesus, before He died, said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." It was His last legacy; His dying gift; in His own eyes of the greatest value, and it should be such in ours.

It is not my habit to preach introductory or farewell sermons. I often think there is much flesh in both, and, to my mind, the less the flesh appears in the pulpit or the pew the better. Natural feelings are to be discouraged by ministers rather than encouraged, for they are very deceptive, and often pass off for spiritual feelings; and this makes me dread them. To work upon people's natural feelings is to be an actor, not a preacher; I therefore rarely, in leaving my own congregations, take leave of them, and when I return I preach as I should have done had I been with them for weeks. But as I would not in ordinary life be deficient in courtesy, neither would I in the things of God; and as these words came to my mind this morning with some little measure of sweetness and savour, it seemed as though they were adapted to close up my ministry this time in London. We cannot have greater blessings than the Lord has here bidden His servants to pronounce; and may it be our blessed desire that the Lord would fulfil in our souls every one of these blessed petitions. I could not leave you six more blessed petitions than these; if I were to ransack God's Word from beginning to end I could scarcely find blessings more weighty, blessings more precious, or blessings more suitable. Therefore I would say, in the name of the Lord, addressing myself to each who fears God in this place, though not for a moment putting myself in the place of Aaron, but simply using the words of the text—"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."