

Israel's Strength and Righteousness

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, April 3, 1859

"Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." Isaiah 45:24, 25

To a conscience divinely awakened, to a soul spiritually quickened to see and feel the guilt and burden of sin, no question can be so urgent, so pressing, so full of the deepest importance as this: "How can my sins be pardoned? How can I, a guilty criminal, stand before the judgment bar of God? I know there is a wrath to come, for even now I feel an earnest of it in my breast. How then shall I escape in that terrible day?" Men dead in sin are too much taken up with the world, or too much buried in its lusts; men dead in profession are too deeply steeped in self-righteousness, to bestow an anxious thought on a matter to them apparently of such little significance, as whether their souls be saved or lost. A rise in stocks or shares, or a fall in the corn market would be to most persons, a much more weighty or at least more interesting subject than such gloomy topics as heaven and hell. But to a man whose conscience is awakened from above—made alive unto God by regenerating grace, it is the question of questions, a matter of life and death. It is with him as if eternal happiness or eternal misery, heaven or hell, hung before his eyes trembling in the balance, and he looked on with fear and trembling as scarcely knowing on which side the scale will fall.

In the exceeding riches of his grace, in the depths of his

boundless compassion and infinite mercy, God has not left us to struggle on in the dark, and at last miserably perish, without affording us a solution of this important question. Pitying our lost, our miserable case, he has given out of his own bosom the Son of his love, that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This wondrous plan of redeeming love he has revealed in the Scriptures of truth, in which the way of salvation shines to an enlightened eye, as with a ray of light, from the opening page to the closing chapter; and to those who fear his name, and whose souls are made alive by a divine power, he gives his Holy Spirit, that he may lead them into all truth. By these divine teachings, they in due time arrive at a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, and are thus delivered not only from the wrath to come, but also from the stings of guilt and the fears of hell by a manifestation to their soul of pardoning love.

In Paradise itself, where man sinned and fell, the glorious plan of salvation first began to dawn. No sooner had man incurred the penalty of offended justice, than mercy stepped in. Scarcely had the serpent twined its wily snare amidst the leaves and flowers of Eden, and entangled first woman and then man in transgression, than grace, like a heavenly dove, descended with that gracious promise, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." Stronger and stronger did this holy light shine, in type and figure, rite and sacrifice, prophecy and promise, through the Old Testament, until in due time the blessed Jesus came and brought life and immortality to light in his own Person, blood, and righteousness, as they now blaze forth in the glorious rays of the everlasting Gospel. Thus a poor, guilty sinner has not now far to seek where salvation is to be found, and how mercy is to be enjoyed. So far as the Lord is pleased to enlighten his eyes and touch his heart with his Spirit, he is

led to see mercy, grace, and truth stored up in the Person and work of God's dear Son: for "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17.) And let us not think that only in the New Testament is salvation by the blood and righteousness of God's dear Son set forth. Though it is more clearly and fully there revealed, yet to an enlightened mind it shines in the Old Testament in almost as clear a light as in the pages of the New. What testimony, for instance, even in the New Testament, can exceed in plainness, beauty, and blessedness, the words that have just sounded from my mouth, and are, as it were, even now ringing in your ears? "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

Three prominent features seem to my mind stamped upon these blessed words:—

I.—*First, in whom Israel has righteousness, strength, and glory.*

II.—*Secondly, the promise that to that same Lord in whom Israel finds righteousness, strength, and glory, men shall come.*

III.—*Thirdly, the solemn denunciation pronounced by the unerring lips of God himself against all that are incensed against this mighty Saviour: "All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."*

I.—You will observe that I have brought together two scattered clauses of our text: the first, "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength;" and the

second, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." I have brought them together to show how in the Lord the seed of Israel have three rich blessings: righteousness, strength, and glory. But I shall now separate them that I may examine them more distinctly and individually, and thus enter into the meaning of the text in a fuller, clearer, and larger manner.

1. Observe, first, who they are of whom the Lord here speaks, and firmly fix your eye on this grand leading point—that the word of promise in our text does not embrace men at large, men in general as they stand upon this earthly ball, on this stage of time, in innumerable masses before that All-seeing eye which views heaven and earth at a glance; but that this declaration comprehends and embraces Israel only; and yet as if with peculiar specialty and marked, determined emphasis, it enfolds in its firm and capacious grasp "all the seed of Israel." The text may have a prospective and prophetic aspect; and, indeed, I believe it has; for we have every reason to believe, from the testimony of God's inspired word, that a day will come when the literal Israel—Israel after the flesh, the now divorced and cast off Jewish Church—shall have a manifested interest in the promises of the Gospel. The apostle Paul has most clearly declared this in that remarkable chapter where he treats of the Gentile and Jewish churches under the figure of an olive tree, and shows that the natural branches—that is, the Jewish church, were broken off for a time, that the wild olive tree, or Gentile church, might be grafted upon the root. But he adds, "And they also, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." (Rom. 11:23); "And so all Israel shall be saved." (Rom. 11:26.)

But that is not the view of the text which I shall take this morning. It has, besides this prophetic aspect, a spiritual

and experimental signification; and as that more immediately concerns us, it is that to which I shall chiefly, with God's help and blessing, direct your attention.

By "the seed of Israel" then, thus spiritually and experimentally viewed, I understand all the elect of God—that Israel which is not Israel after the flesh, but Israel after the spirit, that Israel of whom we read, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Phil. 3:3.) Of this Israel, we have God's own declaration here, that it shall be *justified in the Lord*; and not only so, but that each of the seed of Israel shall arrive at a blessed testimony of this in his own conscience, so as to be enabled to say, and that with unfaltering lips and unwavering tongue, "In the Lord *have I righteousness.*" We see, then, a distinction between these two points. We have first the express declaration of the Most High that all the seed of Israel shall be justified in the Lord: and then we have added to that a special promise, that not only shall all the seed of Israel be thus justified, but that each member of that mystical Israel shall, in his own time, have that sentence of justification in his own heart and conscience, whereby he shall arrive at the happy knowledge of it. The mere doctrine of justification, however plain and clear, will not suffice for an exercised conscience. The mere truth—the bare, literal fact, that all the seed of Israel shall be justified in the Lord, will not speak pardon and peace to a guilty soul. The Holy Ghost must take of the things of Christ and reveal them to the heart with a divine power and a sealed testimony; pardon and peace must be spoken by the mouth of God, and an inward sentence of justification be given and received, before we can take the blessed comfort contained in the text, or read our own title to so clear and gracious a promise.

But if the seed of Israel is to be "*justified in the Lord*," it evidently excludes all other modes of justification. Could Israel have been justified in any other way, what need would there have been for the coming of God's dear Son? If righteousness could have been by the law, there would have been no necessity for the Son of God to suffer, bleed, and die. But by the law no soul can be justified. If you look at the law—if you view it with a spiritual eye, you will perceive how impossible it is for anyone to be justified thereby. The law is holy; we are unholy. The law is righteous; we are sinful. The law is good; we are evil. The law not only aims its alarms and terrors against words and actions: it arraigns thoughts and desires before its severe, its merciless bar. "Thou shalt not covet," and "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," is a two-edged sword which pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12.) The very character of God as a heart-searching Lord requires this. He cannot from his very nature accept an imperfect service. Obedience, to be satisfactory to him who reads all motives and cannot be deceived or mocked by lip service or hand labour, must be perfect and entire. The law, therefore, necessarily requires a perfect obedience; and as there is no entire obedience but that of love, it demands perfect love to God, and that without a wavering thought. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." And as our lot is cast among our fellow men, it also adds—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But to be operative, a law must have a penalty for disobedience, as well as a reward for obedience. Its language, therefore, is—"If thou do not thus love God and man all the days of thy life, without breach, cessation, or intermission, thou art cursed for ever and ever." But who can render to God an obedience of this kind? Who has ever loved him—who, in a state of

nature, can ever love him with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength? Therefore, the law being so strict, so holy, so just, so righteous, so reaching to the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and claiming at our hands an obedience which we cannot render, it necessarily curses and condemns us all. As the apostle says—"That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.)

Now as this is opened up in the heart and conscience of a quickened soul, of a divinely awakened sinner, he begins to look out for a righteousness in which he can stand before God. His own righteousness, he sees and feels, is a bed too short, a covering too narrow. The curse of the law is ringing in his ears. The sentence of the law is burning up his spirit. The wrath of God is felt in the depths of his conscience. He is burnt, if I may use the expression, out of house and home, and stands before God as a justly condemned sinner, as a guilty criminal. Condemned by the law without and by conscience within, he knows not where to hide his head; for he is sensible that he cannot escape the eye or elude the hand of that Almighty Being who surrounds him with his presence and encompasses him with his power. He knows that he is, as a creature of his hands, as a rational, intelligent, responsible agent, amenable to the righteous wrath of God as a transgressor. He, therefore, feels that if he die unpardoned, unjustified, he must sink into the billows of eternal fire, without hope or help. Now this experience of the wrath of God revealed in a broken law is the fruit of a work of grace upon the soul; and by these teachings and convictions it is brought to see and feel the justice and holiness of God, and that the law is exceedingly broad. It is under these feelings and exercises that all fleshly righteousness fades and dies, all creature goodness yields up the ghost, and all human strength and wisdom wither before the touch of God's hand, as the mown grass before the scorching sun.

But O what a blessing it is, that amidst this darkness and condemnation, this wrath, fear, guilt, and bondage, there is a ray of light that shines out of heaven's own gates—a stream of grace that pours down from the Mediator at God's right hand, and which, when revealed to the soul by a divine power, lifts up the eyes and heart of the poor, self-condemned criminal to him in whom mercy is to be found, to him in whom a righteousness is to be obtained.

"In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified." God foresaw the fall from the beginning. The covenant was made between the three Persons of the sacred Godhead with a fore-view of that fall. The Son of God freely gave himself up in the eternal covenant to be made flesh, and in that flesh to pay an obedience that man could not render—to die under the curse of the law which he knew must fall upon man's guilty head, and thus, by being a substitute, to bring in an everlasting righteousness in which the Church of God might be freely, fully, and eternally justified. O what a salvation is this! How complete in all its parts! How glorifying to God; how suitable to man! how adapted to heal the pangs of a bleeding conscience! What wine and oil it pours into those rankling wounds that the law has made, and, with more than Samaritan kindness, provides for all the wants of the stripped and wounded pilgrim, not only for time but for eternity! To view the Son of God coming down from heaven to earth, to assume a nature in which he could work out such a perfect and complete righteousness as the law demanded—a nature to be offered as a bleeding sacrifice, and by the atoning blood thus died to appease the wrath of God, blot out transgression, cancel crime, and clothe the sinner in the robe of righteousness which he wrought out by his active and passive obedience—what an object for faith is this! And as the rich surpassing grace herein revealed is made

experimentally known, faith springs up to receive what the blessed Spirit discovers. What encouragement does this view of bleeding, dying love drop into the soul of the believing saint! What hope and love it raises up in his desponding mind! And though perhaps unable to lay firm hold of this salvation in the full assurance of faith, yet what access it gives him to the throne of grace to pour out his heart with sighs and cries that this righteousness might be revealed to him, put upon him, and that he might stand clothed in it before the eyes of a heart-searching God in the day of Christ's appearing. Many who really and truly fear God are here in the feelings of their heart. For many a saint of God, who has not been fully blessed, knows that he has no righteousness of his own in which he can stand. He has no hope of being saved by a condemning law, or any obedience which he can pay to the precepts of the gospel. He knows that if he live and die an unpardoned sinner, where God is he cannot come, for no unforgiven, unjustified sinner can stand in the judgment before this holy and terrible God. (Psal. 1:5; 1 Sam. 6:20.) But how to get this pardon fully into his soul; how to obtain this sentence of justification clearly and undeniably from the mouth of God; how to be experimentally clothed in this robe of righteousness so as to stand accepted in the beloved, and how to get an evidence of it in his own heart and conscience by the sealing testimony of the Holy Ghost: here he is often at a stand. For at Mount Sinai, in the smoke of whose outskirts he at present stands, there is nothing but darkness, cloud, and storm. His own evil heart is continually suggesting matters of accusations; a guilty conscience is ever condemning; the fears of death are often haunting; Satan, like a flood, is frequently rushing in through the breach; whilst his own desponding sensations of alarm and fear serve but to aggravate the weight of the whole. But all this gives occasion for renewed and unceasing prayer and supplication. This painful and bitter experience weaning him

from weak and fallible testimonies, of which he proves the uncertainty, leads him to search the Scriptures for himself with prayer and supplication that in them he may find hope and help, for everything but God's inspired word he knows and feels is an insufficient foothold for faith. This makes him to come eagerly and gladly under the sound of the preached gospel, in hope that a word from a servant of the Lord may reach his heart, and speak encouragement into his desponding mind. This separates him from the world, for its company and spirit are a burden to his wounded heart; draws him away from the things of time and sense, and by laying on his conscience the solemn weight of eternal realities, makes him walk cautiously, tenderly, and circumspectly in the fear of God. "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of their spirit." Unless they pass in a measure through this furnace, they lose neither their dross nor their tin; unless they are thus put upon the winnowing floor, their dust and chaff are not driven away. All must in a measure pass through this process: all must be exercised in their conscience, that it may be made tender and contrite; and all must be brought down with heart labour into the dust, before God will lift them up. Men may despise this humbling religion, and there is a generation of proud professors—"O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up" (Prov. 30:13), who do not spare to cast their scorn upon it. But the unerring testimony of God's word has stamped it with his approbation. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope." (Lam. 3:26, 27, 28, 29.)

But the exercised family of God are not always kept in this school. When the Lord has been so far pleased to exercise

their mind and make their conscience alive and tender, he removes the veil of unbelief and ignorance that hangs over their heart, and gives them from time to time rays and beams out of the glorious gospel and as each ray shines in upon their soul with fresh and increasing light, it draws forth faith upon the glorious Person of the God-Man. A view by faith of the grace and glory of the Son of God raises them out of their bondage, darkness, and misery into the light of God's countenance; and thus by renewed and repeated communications of spiritual life and light, their feet are guided into the ways of truth and peace.

Let me ask, in all faithfulness and friendliness, how far your mind has been exercised in these important matters? Have you yet learnt that you are a sinner in the sight of God? Have you ever felt the length, breadth, and spirituality of his holy law? Do you feel in your very soul that without Christ's righteousness being imputed to you, and his blood being sprinkled upon your conscience, you must die in your sins and never reach the heavenly shore? Has this ever been, or is it still a matter of anxious solicitude to you? Has it ever caused sighs and groans to come out of your heart? Has the Spirit of prayer ever been given, to make you plead with the Lord for the forgiveness of your sins, through the merits of a crucified Saviour? And have you any hope but in his blood, righteousness, and finished work? Now if the Lord has been pleased to exercise your soul in this way, if he has not yet granted the longing desire of your heart, he certainly will in due time reveal his dear Son in you as the God-man who has saved you from death and hell; he will apply his atoning blood to your conscience, bring near his glorious righteousness, shed abroad his dying love, give and strengthen faith, and draw it forth into a blessed assurance of your interest in the Son of his love. Or if your manifestations should not be very bright and conspicuous, he

will give you a good hope through grace, as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast; and will draw up your affections to that blessed Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father in power, majesty, and glory. And as he does this, he enables the believer thus favoured and blessed to take these words into his lips—*"In the Lord have I righteousness."* He cannot say it before. He may know that there is no righteousness but in the Lord; he may have utterly renounced his own; he may have sunk very deep into guilt and bondage: but until the Lord the Spirit is pleased to liberate him, he cannot come forth into liberty; until he has the witness of the Spirit, he cannot cry, "Abba, Father." But when the Lord is pleased to bring near his righteousness, to reveal his dying love, and to shed it abroad in his heart by divine power, then he can say, "In the Lord have I righteousness." And when he has this, he wants no other: it is complete, which no other can be. It is acceptable to God; it is available in the courts of heaven; it will bear him up through all the storms of time; it will smooth a dying pillow, and land him safely in a glorious eternity.

But there is something very expressive in the phrase *"in the Lord."* Twice is it repeated. "Surely, shall one say, *in the Lord* have I righteousness." Again—*"In the Lord* shall all the seed of Israel be justified." What is the meaning of the expression "in the Lord?" It signifies union with him—a being in him, as the members are in the body, the branches of a vine in the stem, the stones in the building—all which are scriptural figures to show the intimate union which the Church has with Christ. Only so far, then, as any one has union with Christ, is he "in the Lord;" and only so far as he is in the Lord by a present, living, and experimental union, is he so sensibly and assuredly justified by his righteousness that he can say with unwavering lips, "In the Lord have I righteousness." Justification as regards God, is what divines call an

"immanent" act, that is, it always was in his own eternal mind a settled, permanent transaction. Union with Christ must exist before it can be made known; must be before it can be felt to be. My feeling union with Christ no more created union than the felt warmth of my hand or foot put my hand or foot into my body, or seeing or hearing placed eyes and ears in my head. God, therefore, never viewed his people but as righteous, for they were always looked on by his approving and loving eye as one with Christ in covenant ties; as one in him, as the Father and the Son are one. Being thus viewed in the Son of his love, they were always viewed as righteous, for "the goings forth" of Messiah to justify "were from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2.) But as far as regards the way whereby this righteousness was wrought out and brought in, there was a necessity that the Son of God should come from heaven to earth to work it out by obedience and suffering; and in order to realise and enjoy a personal interest in the fruits of this obedience, union with Christ must be revealed and sealed with a divine power upon the heart. This we may call *sensible* union, producing communion, and is that to which all believers are called, as the apostle declares, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9.) Thus we may view justification under three different aspects, and taking place, so to speak, at three different periods:—1. Justification from all eternity, as an immanent act in God's unchanging and unchangeable mind, for with him there is no past, present, or to come, but all is one eternal now; 2. Justification when the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross and rose again for our justification; and 3. Justification when the Holy Ghost seals the blessing home upon the heart, applies the blood, brings near the obedience, and sheds abroad the love. And in this last and most blessed sense, as alone confirming and ratifying the others, not only "in the Lord is all the seed of Israel justified," but each of the

chosen seed, each of the mystical members of his body, shall before death comes to close the scene be enabled to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness."

Now think of these things. Must you not one day stand before the bar of God, and under the heart-searching eyes of him who reads every thought, listens to every word, and knows every action? How can you stand before that awful bar, that dreadful and yet glorious Majesty of heaven, who is a consuming fire against all sin and disobedience, in your own righteousness? I ask thee, I appeal to thine own conscience, if indeed thou hast one in thy bosom, dost thou not tremble to think of standing before the bar of God in thine own righteousness? Can that avail thee before him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity? Wilt thou be able to stand before the Majesty of heaven in those robes of thine, so tattered and torn, so stained with guilt and crime, on which God has already passed the condemning sentence that in his sight they are as "filthy rags?" What hope, then, canst thou have except in the righteousness of the Son of God? Believe me, or rather believe the word of God from me, that there is no other justification before the bar of God but this; for "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rom. 3:20); but "by him," that is, by the Son of God, made flesh and crucified and risen again, "all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:39.) If then the Lord has brought thee to believe in the Son of his love, thou art justified from all things from which thou couldst not be justified by the law, or by any such obedience as the creature could render. And if not fully blessed and delivered, be still assured of this, if God has wounded thee with the law, he will heal thee with the gospel; if he has inwardly condemned thee by a sentence of condemnation, he will inwardly acquit thee by a sentence of

justification: and if he has put thee out of conceit with thine own righteousness, he will make thee fall in love with the obedience of Jesus.

ii. But I pass on to show that Israel is not only justified in the Lord, but is *strong* also in him as well as righteous. For we read—"Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and *strength*."

When Adam sinned and fell, he lost all his strength: he was as Samson when his locks were cut. "When we were yet without strength," says the Apostle, "Christ died for the ungodly." By the fall Adam lost all power to do God's will, to obey his commands, and to walk with him in acceptance as an obedient child. He lost not only power but will; was stripped not merely of ability, but even of the very inclination to obey. And this want of will and power he transmitted as a sad legacy to all his posterity. We have therefore by nature no strength to serve the Lord, to do his will, to keep his commandments, or to bring forth fruit pleasing in his sight. When, therefore, the people said unto Joshua, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord," Joshua answered, "Ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God." (Joshua 24:19.) We have then to learn this important secret for ourselves—a secret hidden from the eyes of all but the Israel of God, that we have no strength; and a most painful lesson it is feelingly and experimentally to learn. But though painful it is most profitable. For it is the grand turning point from error to truth, from self to Christ, from sin to salvation. It is here that men are for the most part so fatally deceived, that they think they have strength when they have none. Many a man hugs himself in his sins till death cuts him down, as believing that he can at any time forsake them; or wraps himself up in his own righteousness, in the secret persuasion of his mind that he can or will one day or other certainly be a

better man, live a religious life, and prepare himself for death. Alas! he is not acquainted with that fatal secret that man has lost his power to serve God acceptably; and does not see that his very deferring the day proves that he has no will, for we do not put off what we love to do, but we do it at once. Vain anticipation of a better and more suitable time than the present hour! But he puts off the day in the fond anticipation that when sickness, old age, or death shall draw near, he will then repent and return to God.

But the Lord does not leave his dear people so to perish in deceit and delusion. The same blessed Spirit who shines as with a ray of light and life into the conscience, to make it feel the guilt of sin, the curse of the law, and its own miserable state as a transgressor, leads it also into this secret, that it has no strength. Have you not some inward testimony that I speak truth here? Have you never felt that you were utterly powerless—that you would believe, but could not; would hope, but could not; would love, but could not; would keep God's word, but could not; would obey his commandments, but were not able? Has a sense of your own miserable impotency and thorough helplessness never pressed you down almost to despair? You felt sure that there was a faith, a hope, a love, a blessing, and a blessedness in the truth of God; a pardon, a peace, a heavenly joy; an assurance of salvation, a union, and a communion with the Lord Jesus, which you saw, but could not reach. You felt that if you could believe, all would be well, but believe you could not. When kept in despondency whether these rich blessings would ever be yours, you would fain hope, but could not raise up a solitary ray; you would try to love God, but felt your heart cold and dead, and more disposed to rebel against him than submit to him. Thus you learnt you had no strength; and this we have to learn again and again by repeated tuition and almost daily experience. I have been a preacher more than

thirty years; I have been a professor—I hope a partaker of grace, more than thirty-two years; and yet I feel now weaker than ever. My experience may be deeper, both of sin and salvation; my knowledge greater of the Lord and his truth; my hope stronger; my faith and love firmer and warmer; but O, my strength is as little as before. No past experience can give me power to believe, to hope, or to love as I fain would bring forth these heavenly graces. And not only as a Christian but as a minister, I am all weakness. Though I have preached hundreds, I might almost say thousands, of sermons, I cannot of myself find a text from which to speak, or have I any power to open up any part of God's truth with utterance, liberty, life, or feeling. I stand before you this morning as I stand before God, depending wholly upon his strength made perfect in my weakness. If I have learnt anything, it is my sinfulness and weakness; and I know and feel that if I am anything, have anything, do anything, speak anything, write anything spiritual and acceptable to the church of God, it must be by the operation and influence of the Blessed Spirit upon my heart.

Now as we learn our weakness in this way, we begin to learn also in whom is our strength; and as we get access to Christ by a living faith, we receive strength out of him for a supply of our spiritual necessities. "Because I live, ye shall live also." As the branches are united with the stem, and through it alone the sap flows into them, causing each branch to put forth bud, and flower, and fruit; so it is with the believer and the Lord Jesus. His own words are—"I am the vine; ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5) It is, then, by virtue of this union that faith and hope and love, with every other grace, flow into the soul out of the fulness of Christ, as the sap flows into the branch out of the fulness of the stem. We therefore read that "it pleased

the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19); and that "out of his fulness we receive grace for grace." (John 1:16.) Paul therefore declares that "the life which he lived in the flesh, he lived by the faith of the Son of God." And what enabled him to live that life of faith but that Christ lived in him? (Gal. 2:20) Yet he learnt his weakness in the same school in which he learnt his strength; for he tells us, though he had been caught up into the third heaven and had heard unspeakable words, yet there was given unto him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. But it was in this way he learnt his strength as well as his weakness; for Jesus spoke to him as with a voice from heaven, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." Then he could "glory in his infirmities," that the power of Christ might rest upon him. (2 Cor. 12:9.) As, then, we learn our weakness, we begin to learn our strength. Despairing of all strength in self, we look to the Lord Jesus Christ, at the right hand of the Father, to give us his; we lift up our prayers and supplications to the great High Priest over the house of God, to strengthen us with strength in our soul; and when he is pleased, in answer to prayer, to send down his Spirit and grace, we are "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." (Col. 1:11.) This is being "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10); and a being "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16.) Thus Abraham was "strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20); and thus the ancient worthies fought and conquered who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." (Heb. 11:33, 34.) It is only, then, as we thus receive strength out of his fulness that we are made strong to

believe, to hope, and to love; to fight against our besetting sins, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, and by the grace of God to mortify the whole body of sin. I believe I may appeal individually to every man's conscience who knows anything of his own heart, and ask him, Can you of yourself resist temptation? Can you fight against besetting sins? Can you crucify the flesh? Can you deny yourself the enjoyment of any strong inclination which nature pleads so hard to gratify? Who can come out of the world, repent of sin, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, be humble, prayerful, holy, spiritually minded, full of gracious thoughts, heavenly desires, pure affections, and every fruit and grace of the blessed Spirit, except by the special power of God? Who can raise up a grain of saving, living faith in his own bosom? I cannot. Who can give himself a good hope through grace? I cannot. Who can create a spark of heavenly love? I cannot. I must depend upon the Lord to do all these things in me and for me, as the earth is dependent upon the rain to fall and the sun to shine that it may bear a crop. My heart is by nature, I well know, a barren wilderness: no good thing, naturally and originally, grows therein. Nor can self-culture mend the soil, or secure a harvest. The Lord must make me fruitful in every good word and work, if I am to walk in his fear, do his will, and live to his praise. And so he himself tells me, for he says, "From me is thy fruit found." (Hosea 14:8.) What gave David victory over Goliath, God's strength, or his own? Saul's armour, or the smooth stones out of the brook? When all men forsook Paul, who but the Lord "stood with him and strengthened him?" (2 Tim. 4:17.) And when we come to die, and flesh and heart alike fail, who can in that last and trying hour be the strength of our heart but he who is our portion for ever? (Psalm 73:26.) All will fall but those who can feel and say, "In the Lord have I strength." For we read as God's own description of those who fall and those who stand, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the

young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." (Isaiah 40:30, 31.)

iii. But there is another blessing also which the seed of Israel obtain from the Lord, and that is "*glory*." The promise runs—"In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." What boasters most men are! You can scarcely fall into five minutes' conversation with any person without either hearing him praise himself, or without seeing an under current of self-exaltation flowing beneath his words. But how opposed this is to grace and godliness! The Lord will teach his family not to glory in self. For "Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches." (Jer. 9:23.) As then the Lord is pleased to open up the length and breadth and spirituality of his holy law; or to discover to us that deep fountain of inward iniquity of which the heart is full, he inwardly and experimentally teaches us not to glory in ourselves or in any other. What have we to glory in? Can we glory in sin? for that is all we really can call our own. Can we glory in the wickedness of our own hearts? What cause of glory have we there, where every fresh discovery should only fill us with increasing shame and sorrow? Can we glory in our graces? Who gave them to us? Can we glory in our gifts, if we have any? Who bestowed them upon us? Can we glory in our experience; in our knowledge; in our consistency? Can we glory in any fruit we may bring forth in heart, lip, or life? Whose are these gifts? From whom come any of these graces? If any man then glory, let him glory in the Lord.

Now as the Lord is pleased to sink the soul and depress it in self, he raises it up in Christ; and as he shows us more and more of the emptiness and sinfulness of man, he shows us more and more of the beauty and blessedness of the Lord

Jesus. We then begin to glory in him. How glorious is the King in his beauty! How glorious his Person as God-Man! in his atoning blood, as cleansing from all sin! in his imputed obedience, as justifying from all transgression! his dying love, as manifested on behalf of our fallen race! How glorious is he in all these relationships and characters! O to behold his glory!—the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth! This is something to glory in. If we do glory, let it be wholly and solely in the Lord; let Christ be our Object and Subject; let his blood, obedience, and love; his Person and work; his grace and glory; his beauty and blessedness; his pity, compassion, and suitability; his promises and precepts; his holy life and suffering death; his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, and his second coming with all his saints at the great day,—be the boast of our heart and the theme of our tongue. Thus to praise and bless his holy name is to walk in those gracious footsteps trodden by the saints of old: "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee; they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom." (Ps. 145:10, 11, 12.) If we must speak well of any one, let us speak well of the blessed Jesus. Let man sink; let the Lord rise. Let the creature fall into his right place, and be nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity (Isa. 40:17); and let the Lord be exalted in our songs of praise as God over all, blessed for ever.

II.—But, to advance onward to our *second* point, there may be those here—a majority, it may be, of those who truly fear the Lord—who have not fully received the rich blessings of salvation by grace with divine power into their soul, yet, like the saints of old, have seen them afar off, and are persuaded of them, and embrace them to the utmost extent of their

faith; but still come short.

And there may be others who have scarcely gone so far as to have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," yet feel their deep and daily need of him. To both these characters the second part of our text speaks, and to them the promise which it contains is given:—"*Even to him shall men come.*" The Lord has given an absolute promise that "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." And no less absolute is the addition, and as it were divine corollary to that promise, "To him shall men come." What men? The very men who by coming and receiving shall be able in his own time to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Then they come to him that they may receive these blessings from and out of him; for from him alone can they receive either righteousness, strength or glory. But how can they receive these things from him if they come not to him for that express purpose? And who gives them will and power to come? The Father himself, according to the Lord's own words, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44.) But will the Father draw all the chosen vessels of mercy to Jesus? Surely he will; for the Lord adds, "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." (John 6:45.) But who are these "all" who are thus "taught of God" and by him drawn to Christ? Are they all the human race, or even all who hear the preached gospel? What prophecy does the Lord quote here? Is it not "*all thy children shall be taught of the Lord?*" And who are "thy children" but Zion's children—the sons and daughters of "the Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all." (Isaiah 54:13; Gal. 4:26.)

But this coming may be your present experience. You can

scarcely rise beyond this point—that you are a coming sinner—a praying, suing, seeking, begging soul; often a guilty, self-condemned criminal in your own conscience, yet crying to the Lord to manifest his forgiving mercy and pardoning love to your soul. If this be your experience, you have most clearly an interest in the promise that "to him shall men come!" God the Spirit is now working the fulfilment of that promise in your heart; for you are coming. Are you not coming even now to his feet? Why have you come this morning to hear his word of grace and truth from my lips? Is it not that you may hear something to give you a hope of your interest in the blood, love, and obedience of Jesus? A word of comfort that may encourage your soul still to look, and long, and wait; or that the Lord himself by his word applied with power may clearly manifest to you your adoption into the family of God? Why did you kneel before the Lord this morning in secret prayer? Why did you lift up your heart and voice in earnest supplication to the throne of his grace with this petition on your lips, that he would bless you with a sense of his pardoning love, would manifest himself unto you as your Lord and God, and give you a testimony that you were his for time and eternity? Was not this for the most part the subject of your secret cry? This was a coming. Whilst I have been speaking this morning, of his grace and glory, and the blessedness of being able to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength," have there been no secret breathings of your soul towards God—no inward desires that the Lord would manifest these rich blessings to your soul? This is a coming. Every act of faith whereby you look to Jesus is a coming. Every beam and ray of hope in his blood and righteousness is a coming. Every sigh, groan, or tear; every contrite feeling, every breathing desire of a broken heart,—all are a coming. So that though you may not be able to realize as fully as you could wish an interest in the former part of the promise, "Surely, shall one

say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength;" yet there is wrought in your soul by a divine power that secret coming whereby you have a manifested interest in the second part of it—"Even to him shall men come." We cannot come until we are drawn. "Draw me," says the bride, "we will run after thee." (Song 1:4.) "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jerem. 31:3.) When we are drawn, then we come and cannot but come. It is good to come. Even those who have received must be ever coming. We get nothing but by coming. Our daily life, as one of faith and hope, is a life of coming. Our continual prayer is a continual coming. I preach that you may come; you hear that you may come. For the language of the church still is, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.) Thus must we be ever coming that we may be ever receiving; and so everything that makes us come has in it a real or an implied blessing. Nor will you come in vain, be you who or what you may. "For him that cometh to me," the blessed Lord himself has said, "I will in no wise cast out."

III.—But I cannot close my subject without dwelling for a few moments upon the last point—the solemn *denunciation* that God has pronounced: "*All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.*" Here is a clear division between the Lord's friends and the Lord's foes; between those who believe, and by believing, receive righteousness, strength, and glory, and those who are incensed with anger against that most blessed Lord. O how numerous, may I not add, innumerable a class! how many in our day are incensed against the God of all grace, simply because salvation is alone of grace, when, from man's fallen condition, and his actual as well as original sinfulness, it cannot by any possibility be in any other way.

How they rise up in arms against the blessed Jesus, because out of him there is no righteousness or strength. How they will not have him to reign over them, because they must part with their sins that they may serve him with an obedient heart, and a holy, godly life. How they rebel against his eternal Sonship, though it is his very mode of subsistence, as well as his rightful claim and dearest title; against his Person as God-Man; against his atoning blood, his justifying obedience, and what he is as the Christ of God at the right hand of the Father. Or if they dare not fully vent their rebellious thoughts against the Lord himself, how they are incensed against his people, his servants, his truth, his ordinances, his revealed will, and his strait and narrow way of trial and tribulation. But O, what will be the awful consequence of all this angry displeasure against the enthroned King of Zion? "They shall be ashamed"—it may be not in this life, for "the unjust knoweth no shame," (Zeph. 3:5) and there is such a thing as "refusing to be ashamed." (Jer. 3:3.) But there is "an awakening to shame and everlasting contempt" in that day when they that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; when "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. 12:3.)

In that day when the Judge of all shall sit on the great white throne, from whose face the earth and the heaven will flee away, then, "whosoever is not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:15.) How then those who, in this life, were incensed against the Lord of life and glory shall be covered with confusion, and shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them and hide them "from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." But they shall call in vain, for he who cannot lie has already pronounced their fearful doom—"All

that are incensed against him shall be ashamed," for "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh." (Isaiah 66:24.) And as surely as God is true, as surely as he hath sworn by himself that in the Lord, his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory, so surely all, without exception, that are incensed against the Son of his love shall be ashamed; for he who has "ordained a lamp for his anointed," or his Christ, has declared of him, "His enemies will I clothe with shame; but upon himself shall his crown flourish." (Psalm. 132:18.) "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (Matt. 21:44.) Well then may we add this word of sacred counsel, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." (Psal. 2:12.)

We say, then, to each, to all, Look to the matter as regards your own conscience, your own way, and your own end. Religion is a personal thing; for "none," however desirous, "can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." (Psal. 49:7.) Here are three distinct characters spoken of—two on the right side, and the other on the left. Two on the line of life, and the other on the line of death. Those who can say "In the Lord have I righteousness," and those who are coming to him,—both are safe in the hollow of his hand; these have an interest in his blood and love. "All things are theirs; for they are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) But there are those, it may be, under the very sound of my voice, who are incensed against him; and of them God has said, "they shall be ashamed." I sound it in their ears, and may God, if it be his will, sound an alarm in their heart. The God of truth and

righteousness will be faithful to his own word, and will not give the lie to his own testimony.