

PROFITABLE TEACHING AND SURE GUIDANCE

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day morning, October 31, 1858

"Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." Isaiah 48:17

The word of truth is full of the most precious promises, which whether viewed individually or taken collectively are worth thousands of gold and silver; not that I wish to despise or deprecate God's gifts; for it often happens, that the man that despises them most with his lips, is seen to seek after them the more greedily with his hands; but the Lord gives bountifully, be it little or much. If He has given little—"Godliness with contentment is great gain." If much, let those who possess it remember that they are stewards not proprietors.

But however we may value the supply of our earthly wants, yet, what are these compared to the riches of God's grace, and what is stored up in these promises, of which the apostle Peter says, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:4.) Now all these promises stand upon an immutable foundation; because they stand not only on the fixed purposes of God; but they stand also upon the solemn decrees of God, they stand upon the everlasting covenant "ordered in all things sure and steadfast," ratified in Christ, lodged in Him; and He applies these promises to the soul, being as we are told, a minister of the sanctuary, and of

the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not men.
(Heb. 8:2.)

Now these promises are only precious to those who believe. We must be taught of the Holy Spirit to feel our need of these promises, we must be brought into the various situations to which these promises apply, we must be poor and needy and destitute, and brought to thorough beggary and bankruptcy, to complete insolvency, before these promises can drop into our souls in their full value. But the same thing that lays low, raises tip; the same thing that wounds, heals. And when the Lord has seen good to bring down in His providence or grace, then He is pleased in His own time and way to lift and raise up; and this He does by the application of His precious promises, which are then more valued than thousands of gold and silver.

We have a very blessed promise in the words before us—
"Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, 'I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.'"

In opening up these words I shall with God's blessing:

I.—First, speak a little upon the character of the Speaker, who says of Himself that He is Israel's "**Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.**"

II.—Secondly, on the blessed statement or declaration which He makes, "**I am the Lord thy God.**"

III.—Thirdly, of the special office which He holds as the Lord God of Israel, that **He teaches her** and that to profit. And:

IV.—Fourthly, what sure and heavenly guidance He affords, **"Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldst go."**

I. How personal and individual the Lord is, **"Thy Redeemer"**—**"Thy God"**—**"Teach thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldst go."** As though the Lord singled out an individual, a favoured individual, and speaking to him from His own courts of bliss, He addressed these words to his soul, as though there were no other upon earth to whom He spoke them. And that is the beauty and blessedness of an appropriating faith, that by virtue of an appropriating faith the soul is as much interested in the love, blood and grace of God, as though it was the only one in earth or heaven which enjoyed that favour. **"Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."** The Lord speaks here, and shall we not pay attention?

How does the Lord open that sublime prophecy in Isa. 1? "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;" and why? **"for the Lord hath spoken."** Well may the heavens give ear, and well may the earth attend; for the Lord hath spoken. When our excellent Queen sits annually upon her throne in Parliament, how every sentence that she utters is paid attention to, and how her speech is reported word by word, and sent from place to place to the ends of the earth; because she speaks as a queen with power; for, "Where the word of a king is there is power." If then the Lord of heaven and earth, the King of kings, speak, are not His words to be attended to? If we listen to the words of an earthly monarch, shall we not listen to Him that sits as the King of kings on his exalted throne surveying and governing all things? What strong unbelief it is that makes us inattentive to the words of Him who speaks from the courts of heavenly bliss!

And what does He say? **"Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."** Surely, if we are under any feeling sense of what we are as sold into captivity, if we are under any feeling sense of the greatness of redeeming love, if we know anything of the power and efficacy of atoning blood, anything of the sufferings and sorrows of an incarnate God, surely we should open our ears and hear what the Redeemer says, when He speaks to us under this endearing relationship. But if there are any here who have felt no need of a Redeemer, have never groaned in captivity and bondage, then they can know nothing of redeeming love; but poor guilty sinners who know what it is to have sold themselves, and that without money, these prize the words of redeeming love; because they are so suitable to them in their sorrow and misery. But why should the Lord speak of Himself here as Israel's Redeemer? Let us examine the words more closely; for we may gather up something that may profit our souls. Now sin, horrible sin, dreadful and damnable sin—I can give it no other word, for I feel it to be both these—now this dreadful and damnable sin of ours, is the cause of all our misery. We inherited it not only from our first parents, but we have sinned ever since we came into being; yea, we were conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity, and so ever since we came forth into this world until the present time we have sinned in every thought, word and deed. Now when the Lord the Spirit begins His gracious work upon a sinner's heart and conscience, one of the first things He makes him to feel is that he is a captive to sin. He feels in a position from which he cannot extricate himself. As the Church of England well speaks in one of her collects, "We are tied and bound with the chain of our sins." Sin has cast around him a chain, from which he cannot extricate himself, and under the sense of sin he feels bound in captivity and bondage. How he hails the first gleam of light that shows him the way of escape out of his dungeon! Suppose you were

travelling in a foreign land, and were arrested by one of its despots, and thrown into a deep vault by the side of some flowing river, how you would hail the first gleam of light that shone into this dungeon to give you hope that you would get your liberty again! So it is with a poor sinner. With the first tidings of redeeming mercy and of dying love, such rays and beams break in upon his mind that seem to dispel his captivity. What a sweet influence it is to him! How it breaks up those chains and bonds in which he is held so firmly and fast by the sense of sin which lies upon his conscience as a heavy load!

Many of the dear lambs of God are under legal taskmasters, in dead congregations, under a legal ministry, and they are mourning over their bondage, captivity, and death, because they never hear the sound of the gospel. There they are shut up in captivity; for the glad tidings of grace have never reached their ears, nor have the beams of salvation shone into their hearts. But when the Lord is pleased to bring salvation to their ears by the blood and obedience of the Lord the Lamb, and faith is raised up in their hearts to believe the message that the Holy Ghost brings them, they become manifestly "new creatures," Christ is made precious to them, and formed in their heart the hope of glory. And then He becomes their Redeemer, to redeem them from the hand of the enemy, from the hand of him who is stronger than they, from the grasp of Satan, the curse of the law and the dreadful condemnation of a guilty conscience; from the torturing doubts and fears instilled by the father of lies, and from the gloomy bondage that sin and guilt bring over the soul. But when the warm rays of salvation by grace appear on the horizon, how blessed are these beams! They raise up hope in the saint's heart, because they open up to him the way of escape and the truths of salvation. He sees that his sins may be or are pardoned, by which he can escape the

damnation of hell, and be with Jesus, and dwell with Him in the courts of bliss for evermore. Then He is a **"Redeemer,"** and He is also **"The Holy One of Israel."**

How **holy** is the Lord! because He is the **holy** Son of God. He is the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father in truth and love, and as such He is holy; for the seraphim and cherubim in the temple cry out before Him day and night without ceasing, **"Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth!"** **Holy** is the Father!

Holy is the Son! and **Holy** is the Holy Ghost! So that as the Son of God, the second person in the glorious Trinity, He is the **"Holy One,"** and as man, as wearing a **holy** humanity, He is the **"Holy One of Israel."** All His thoughts when upon earth were perfectly **holy,** all His words were **holy,** all His sighs, groans, tears, sorrows, and griefs were **holy,** His sufferings unto death were all holy and His blood and obedience were **holy** and thus he is the **"Holy One of Israel"** in whom a Holy God can take pleasure. Now this is the Jesus to whom the eyes of our faith must look. Here is an encouragement for a storm-tossed soul, and here is salvation for a poor guilty sinner, a precious Saviour for those that feel their need of a Redeemer,—**"The Holy One of Israel."**

Now to whom do you look when your soul is exercised with various storms and guilt and fears—when your sins rise up to view like so many gaunt specters—when darkness and distress fill your mind, and you seem as if you must sink for ever? Do you look and cry to Him who is ready to save you? Does He ever stretch forth His hands towards you? Then you know him to be a **"Redeemer"**—**"The Holy One of Israel."** If you fix your eyes upon Him you are fixing your eyes upon Him who is ready to save, and if your eyes are fixed upon Him, you approve of Him whom God approves of. You receive

Him whom God receives and the eyes of God look upon you with the same love and approbation that they look upon the **"Holy One of Israel."** **"Look unto him and be ye saved all the ends of the earth."**

II.—Now I pass on to our second point—the blessed declaration which this "Holy One of Israel" has given in the words, **"I am the Lord thy God."** Oh, what words are these, **"I am the Lord thy God."** Now how can He be this? How can He say, **"I Myself,"** looking to His poor Israel below, **"I am the Lord thy God?"** How became He the Lord their God? He became so by virtue of an everlasting covenant ordered in all things sure and steadfast; that is the foundation of the whole, the everlasting covenant wherein and whereby God the Father gave to Him the innumerable multitude who should be saved by His blood and obedience, and who should be members of His mystical body, that He might have a people in whom He could be glorified as the Lord most blessed, which subject He opens up in John 17 John's Gospel, chapter 17, where He says, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." And behold now He stands high up in the courts of heaven and says, "Behold I and the children which thou hast given me."

Now here are the children which God gave Him in eternity to be His children, His pride, His jewels, His sheep, His pleasure, His delight, the members of His mystical body, that He

should in them take an eternal delight, and in them be eternally glorified. Now the question is whether you or I have an interest in these precious realities? You approve of them as they drop from my lips. You cannot doubt what I say, nor disbelieve it; because it is commended to your consciences; still the question may arise and should arise—"Am I a partaker in these divine realities? Am I one of God's chosen ones? Did He elect me to eternal life? Was my name written down in the lamb's book? Was I, poor miserable I, given to Jesus in this heavenly council, in this divine engagement, in this everlasting covenant?"

Now in order to know this we must look a little to the dealings of this most blessed Jesus. Let us take a supposition. Here is a woman married many years ago to her husband; but she may get into a certain state of mind, and the question may arise whether this man whom she calls her husband is really her husband! It may be a temptation, a dream, a mental infirmity, or a suggestion of Satan that has overtaken her; and she will begin to enquire about when they were married, who performed the ceremony, and how things were, and she will look back and see that it is either a suggestion of Satan, a temptation, or a delusion that has taken hold of her, and when she can look back to the time when and the place where she was married, and recollect all the circumstances of that day when they became one, then this infirmity of mind, this wonderful dream or mental delusion is all dispersed, and it is proved beyond dispute that he is her husband and that she is his wife. So in grace, either from the weakness of your faith, the accusations of a guilty conscience, or from gloomy feelings within, you may doubt or question whether the marriage ceremony ever took place between your soul and Christ, whether He ever gave and put upon your finger the ring of wedded love, and called you by His name. You have to look back, and see if you can again

recall the circumstances when the blessed majesty of heaven sealed His love upon your conscience, put the ring of eternal union upon your finger, and bestowed upon you a sense of His love to enable you to call Him yours. Then if the Lord has ever bestowed a look of love upon you, He says, "I am the Lord thy God." He has taken possession of you, made you to know it; and sealed His love upon your heart, or if you cannot go so far as this as to say when you were one by a holy tie, yet are you engaged with Him? Have you renounced all other suitors and given your virgin heart and the affections of your spiritual mind to Jesus, that He may be yours, and has He on His side so far bespoke you as to have given you sometimes a smile, sometimes a touch with His gracious hand, or sent a sweet promise into your soul with power?

If you cannot say with appropriating faith, "My beloved is mine," yet you are in love with Him; He has wooed you, and you want no other lover; He has engaged your affections and given you that discovery of Himself that has made you love Him with a pure heart fervently. If you can get no further than this it is a mercy; for He is a Redeemer as well as the Lord God. If you feel a poor wretched sinner who cannot do anything to deliver your own soul and yet you are seeking help from the sanctuary, the happy day shall come when you the prisoner shall go free. When in darkness shew yourself men. Perhaps a great majority of the saints of God have had to be in the prison house a long time before taken out into the glorious liberty of the people of God, into the sweet enjoyment of the gospel day; yet they all got their freedom in His own good time.

III.—But I pass on to what the Lord says of those whom He claims as His, that he **teacheth them to profit.** "Which **teacheth thee to profit.**" That is the first mark of our being

the Lord's, that He becomes our teacher. We may have learned much from men, much from books, and the Bible itself may have instructed us in many things. You have heard me for twenty years, and surely have collected something, something has been stored up, in mind or memory, if not in heart and conscience. Thus you may have got a good acquaintance with the theory of experience, or you may have got hold of a sound doctrine, and yet not have felt anything of the power of divine teaching and the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart and conscience. Therefore, do not mistake a well-instructed head for a gracious heart, nor do you mistake a sound creed and consistent theory with a work of power and me living work of grace upon the conscience.

I fear many live and die under the awful mistake of believing that because they have a consistent theory of experience, because they profess to hear certain ministers and read certain books, and sit in a certain seat for years, they are thereby saints of God, when there may not be one grain of saving grace in their heart; but this is a mark of the Lord being the soul's Redeemer that the soul owns God as its teacher "which teacheth to profit." Now if you don't know this you are a poor, dark, ignorant wretch with all your learning; it may be that you can prattle very well about religion, but have you seen yourself a poor benighted wretch, so that there seems at times not a single ray of light in your soul? Do you know anything of darkness and clouds, of ignorance besetting your mind? It may be that you are now in the midst of darkness, darkness which may be felt, Egyptian darkness; then you are not under God's teaching; it has yet to come, light has not yet broken into your soul to show that darkness.

I cannot do with such very wise people, they know too much for me to instruct them; but when I see and come in

conversation with a poor soul that begins to see and feel its ignorance, darkness and inability to do anything of itself; I can trace in it a desire, though feeble and faint, to get at a little heavenly teaching, and feel after faith, love, the fear of God, and His work upon the soul, then that comes which breaks up all that might hinder a union, and we see eye to eye in the things of God. If I had a child to teach I should first begin to inquire what he knew, and perhaps I should find that he knew very little; then I must begin at the beginning, commencing with the foundation. It is like an architect coming to look at a house whose walls begin to bulge, and the slates on the roof of which seem as if they would break in. The owner may say, "Let us see whether we cannot patch it up a little," but the more the architect looks the worse he finds it to be; instead of being built of good sound rock, it is built perhaps of nothing but mud, and the timber is wretched deal, and everything else is put together in the same way, so that what with bad materials, bad treatment, and long service, he is afraid to touch it, for fear the whole should tumble upon him; thus he has to lay the foundation, and get up the building from the bottom.

So in grace, the Lord begins at the beginning, the plans and resolutions being laid out, and He will not take to building at first with His jewels and precious stones, but being a master workman, He makes thorough work of it, and He will teach you first lessons with His own finger upon the heart. He will teach you out of the law, "Blessed is the man that continueth in all things written in this book to do them," and "Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things to do them." He will teach you what a sinner you are! What a wicked heart you have! What the law is! How particular the commandment is! What a terrible curse is attached to it, and what Mount Sinai is, till you shall see the flashes of God's anger, and He will make you feel time after time in your soul, what a sinner you

are, until you begin to think there never was such a wretch on God's earth before, you verily believe there never could have been a heart so full of sins, of bruises, and putrifying sores, and there never was a man or woman with a heart like yours, so filthy and polluted is it, and so full of base desires. Here is a little of the breaking in of the truth of God upon your heart, giving you to see light in God's light.

Now you begin to know a little for yourself, and you feel your way towards more knowledge, more teaching, more light, and power, and to have the truth of God opened up. You have now new views of the truth of God, and you think "What high doctrines these hold! but after all, these are the men, these are the people, these are the sermons, these are the very things that suit my naked, guilty, filthy, distressed soul, these point my poor sinful heart to the Redeemer, and these bring before my eyes the way by which my guilt and filth may be purged and washed away." Now the Lord is teaching you this out of His word; for what a light does He cast upon His sacred truth! what light upon the Scriptures at times! a whole text is so full of light and sweetness, that it is like the honeycomb that cannot hold the honey, it is so full of it. So a text is sometimes so full of honey it cannot hold it, it drops through, as David says of his cup, "My cup runneth over," it runs over with sweetness; so He teaches you out of the word, then afflictions "make us see what else would 'scape our sight." You have seen your poor tabernacle perhaps consuming away under disease, with a prospect of speedy dissolution before you. All these things try your mind, they make you conscious of what you never knew before, they open up the realities of eternal things, and lay eternal things with weight upon your conscience, and you can see things as they are.

"Which teacheth thee to profit." There is a beauty here, it is all to **profit**. Why does the tradesman stand up early and late behind his counter? Why does the mechanic stick to his bench, and the labourer knock his feet against the clods? It is for profit. For who would stand behind the counter, and what labourer or mechanic would perform those things that bring toil to the mind, and fatigue to the body, except for profit? It is profit that puts the plough upon the field, and sows the grains of seed in broad furrows, profit is the great wheel that puts and keeps everything in motion.

"Which teacheth thee to profit." No other teaching is profitable. When a person examines his books at the end of the year, and "nil" is the sum total, so a person may sit under sermons, prate and prattle about religion; but what has he got, if he has got nothing of the Lord's teachings? He cannot say he has got anything; but if he has got that which shall save him from death and the law and take him to eternal bliss; and when he can look over the teachings of God, and see heaven as the balance, eternal righteousness in the kingdom of God as his enduring portion, oh! what millions are these to his account—what treasures? You may have had to walk in paths of great gloom and distress, dismay, doubt and fear; family afflictions, personal afflictions, painful bereavements, and trying temptations, may have crowded round you. But look at both sides, cast up the sum total, the creditor and the debtor side, and oh! if you can see eternal life and a kingdom of endless glory to be yours for ever at the great day! oh! what profit the Lord has given you by the teaching he has bestowed upon you! All other teaching is utterly unprofitable, it never does the soul any good; but is ever a prey to sin and Satan, and it lives under the eternal wrath of God and displeasure of the Almighty. What have I learned to profit? What have you learned to profit? If we have learned to fear God, that is

profit; to believe in Jesus, that is profit; if we have had a testimony of our interest in and a blessed manifestation of dying love, and felt a sweet evidence that when He comes we shall be with Him in glory; these are things learned to profit.

IV.—But I pass on to my last point, upon which I must be brief. What sure and heavenly guidance He affords. **"Which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."** Now there is a way we should go, and a way we should not go. Our evil nature is always bent on going the way we should not go, the way of the world, of sin, of self-righteousness, the way of carnality and death, that is the way we should not go; of self-indulgence, earthly delights, and sinful gratifications, in which the men of this world specially delight. This is the broad way that leads to eternal destruction, in which the multitude walk that walk toward evil, that thou shouldest not go and will not go. There is a curse in that way.

See well to it then that thy feet are in the way that thou shouldest go, and what is this way? The way of the Lord Jesus Christ, the way of faith, of hope, the way of obedience to His will and word, the way of holiness in which the redeemed alone walk, the way of truth, righteousness, and self-denial, the way of bringing forth fruit pleasing and acceptable to God, the way in which the holy prophets walked, the way in which the martyrs, apostles, and saints of God have all travelled. Now this is a way of tribulation, temptation, and affliction, it is a straight and narrow path, but the only one that leads to life, and the Lord will lead His saints and bring them to the end of it, which is salvation to the soul; and in this they will glory; and never cease to praise the Lord, their Redeemer, Teacher, and Guide, throughout the ages of eternity.