

## **Spiritual Blessings in Heavenly Places**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, June 18, 1865

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Eph. 1:3, 4

As the Person, work, and glory of Christ are the main object, so the grand distinctive truths of the gospel are or should be the main subject of the Christian ministry; for, as He, who is the Bread of life, is their sum and substance, they only are the real, solid, substantial food of every believing heart. You will observe my expression, "are or should be;" for what the Christian ministry is, and what the Christian ministry should be is not exactly the same thing. It is not for me, who am less than the least of all saints and the chief of sinners, to cast any reflection upon my brethren in the ministry; and yet I cannot help making this observation, that the grand discriminating truths of the glorious gospel of the grace of God are not brought forward so prominently as they should be by some gracious men of God of whose spirituality, ability, and usefulness we cannot doubt. Many good men, in the exercise of their ministry, confine themselves almost wholly to the tracing out of the first work of grace upon the heart, and to confirm and strengthen it by bringing forward the chief scriptural evidences of divine life in the soul, so as to encourage those who are full of doubt and fear as to the reality of what they would gladly hope has been wrought in them by the mighty power of God. This is good. It is an important part of the work of the ministry to comfort those who are cast down, to strengthen the weak hands, and

confirm the feeble knees, and to say to those who are of feeble heart, Be strong, fear not. (Isaiah 35:4.) Nor can there be any doubt that one gracious means of doing this is by tracing out every mark of divine life, even the feeblest and smallest that is in harmony with the word of truth, and will bear strict scrutiny as given by God himself for the comfort of his doubting, fearing family. But it is a great mistake to think that this is the whole, or even the most important part of the ministry of the gospel. We certainly find something beyond this in the sermons recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and still more so in the Epistles of the New Testament, which, though not sermons, we may well consider to be the fullest and completest instruction which could be furnished by the Holy Ghost for the Church of God. May we not also well ask whether, in furnishing the gospel table, meat should not be provided for men as well as milk for babes? Are there in the congregation this morning before me none but little children? Surely there are or should be in it fathers who know him that is from the beginning, and young men who are strong, in whom the word of God abides, and who have overcome the wicked one. Are these to be passed by, and none spoken unto but the little children, the babes in grace, the youngest and weakest of the family? Our gracious Lord, in his farewell charge to Peter, said, "Feed my lambs;" but he also twice said to him, "Feed, my sheep." He would not be thought to be a good shepherd naturally who devoted all his care and attention to the lambs, and neglected the ewes and the wethers. So should the gospel shepherd feed the whole of the flock, whether young or old, for much of his business lies among the lost, the driven away, the broken, and the sick. (Ezek. 34:4, 16.) It is therefore a great mistake, and what the apostle strongly condemns, to be always "laying the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." We should leave these principles or first elements of the doctrine of Christ,

and go on unto perfection, that is, to some maturity in the divine life; for otherwise that reproof is suitable to us: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong drink." (Heb. 5:12.) The Christian ministry, therefore, must go beyond describing the first work of grace and tracing out the signs and evidences of divine life; for this part of the ministry should be considered merely as the elements, its lowest and weakest portion, and that there is something far beyond this to make the preaching of the gospel what the Holy Ghost declares it was intended to be, "for the perfecting of the saints, and the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Eph. 4:12, 13.) A good foundation is necessary; but we want the building to be reared as well as the good foundation to be laid. Now this can only be done by holding forth to the Church the Person and work of Christ in all their various bearings and relationships, and by bringing before the people the grand distinguishing truths of our most holy faith. Nay, in my judgment, such preaching, if it spring out of a sweet and gracious experience of the truth of God, and drop from the lips of the preacher with that unction and savour which the Lord only can bestow, is much more likely to bring doubting souls out of fear and bondage than the tracing out of evidences of the life of God within; for often, in looking for those evidences, the more they look the less they find; and thus instead of looking out of themselves to the Lord of life and glory, to receive of his fulness grace for grace, they are ever occupied with self-examination—good in its way, but which often leads only to self-condemnation.

There is also another disadvantage, not to say evil, in so

continually dwelling upon the first work, that it leads people to rest upon evidences instead of blessings. Now these two things are widely distinct, and should be ever kept separate. Evidences I compare to milestones or direction posts, or, if you like the figure better, to stiles or gates, all which are very good, and needful to point out the road and securely fence it; to show how far we have come; and a stile or gate by the wayside is useful and convenient sometimes to sit down upon and rest when we are tired; but one would not like to sleep all night under a milestone or by the side of a gate, or think, gipsy-like, that even a tent by the roadside with a little broken victuals was all that was necessary to give us food and lodging for the night. It certainly would not be the same thing as a warm, comfortable resting-place, were it but a roadside inn, where we might get food, warmth, and shelter, and go on our way next morning with recruited strength. Evidences, then, as evidences, be it ever borne in mind, are not and were not intended to be rest, food, and shelter. They are excellent waymarks; but try to feed upon or rest for any time in them, and you will soon find them crying out, "No food, no rest here. You must go further on for food and lodging. These are only to be had in the house of blessing where Jesus himself makes the bed, spreads the table, and entertains the guests." Whilst then we do not despise or overlook evidences, for they are most useful in their place, let it ever be our main object and desire to obtain blessings, such as some application of the word of truth with power to our heart, some manifestation of Jesus to our soul.

These thoughts you may perhaps find to have some connection with the subject which this morning I hope to bring before you, which will be chiefly to open and establish this grand point, as so beautifully brought forward in our text, that God hath blessed us, already blessed us, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that

these blessings, therefore, are not for the first time given when we believe, but that even before we believe, if we are amongst the chosen in Christ, we were blessed beforehand with every blessing which we shall enjoy for time or eternity. I can say for myself that I have seen and felt great beauty and blessedness in the truths laid down so clearly in the word before us, and have been desirous, from what I have seen and felt in them, to bring them before you, for there is everything in them for the encouragement and consolation of you who are looking and longing for the visitations of the mercy and love of God. And if indeed, as being amongst those who believe in his dear Son, God himself has already blessed us with all spiritual blessings, and stored them up in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, how we are encouraged thereby to come to him in faith and prayer, to receive out of his fulness such communications of heavenly grace as shall bring us into a heartfelt enjoyment and sweet experience of the blessings themselves.

Bear then in mind three things: 1, that we are blessed, already blessed, with every spiritual blessing in Christ; 2, that there must be a manifestation and a communication of those blessings to our soul; 3, that it is through faith those blessings are laid hold of and realised as our own.

In opening up the words of our text, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I.—*First*, direct your minds to that most blessed *fact*, which I have already named, that God "*hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

II.—*Secondly*, the *end, aim, and object* of God in thus blessing us: it is "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

III.—*Thirdly*, according to *what fixed purpose* God has done this: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

I.—But before I dive into the bosom of my text, to bring out of it, if the Lord enable, some of its choice treasures, it will be desirable to gain some clear conception of the meaning of various expressions in it as used by the apostle. Unless we start with some clear conception of the meaning of the words which he has employed to set forth the grand truths which he brings before us, we shall hardly be able to get into the mind of the Spirit in the text. Nor is this a word of counsel only for the present occasion. Whenever we read the Scriptures we should always seek to understand the exact meaning of the words employed by the blessed Spirit in his revelation of heavenly truth. It is sad to see how many even of the dear family of God go on reading the Scriptures from year to year, and yet, with all their reading, seem at the end to know as little of the mind of the Spirit in them as at the beginning. This may partly arise from natural dulness of intellect, but may much more frequently be traced to indolence and carelessness. The word of God is not to be read, at least to any profit, in this indolent, careless manner. In order to yield up its treasures, it must be sought and searched into, prayed over, and meditated upon, as the wise man speaks: "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." (Prov. 2:3-6.) I shall, therefore before I dive into the depths of the text to bring out what the Lord may enable me to lay before you, just draw your attention to a few words or terms which the Holy Ghost has here made use

of by the pen of Paul, which I shall endeavour to explain as simply and as clearly as I can.

i. First, then, what is the meaning of the word "blessing," which forms so prominent a feature in our text? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." (Eph. 1:3.) You will observe that the apostle blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as having blessed us with spiritual blessings. Does he not use the word "bless" here in more than one sense? for we cannot say that we can bless God in the same way as God blesses us. *Ours* is a mere ascription of praise to God; for how can we, by any words or deeds of ours, add anything to his bliss who is blessed for evermore? But *his* blessing us puts us into the possession and enjoyment of what will make us happy for evermore. He would still be the same, whether we blessed him or not; but not so with us. Nothing is added to the light, heat, and splendour of the sun by the millions of acres of waving corn which it ripens; but where would be the food of a nation but for his glorious rays? So all our praise and thanksgiving cannot add anything to the bliss and blessedness of God; for he would still be what he is had we all perished under his curse. And yet he condescends to listen to our feeble lispings of thankful praise, and to glorify himself by blessing us.

But to return; what are we to understand by the term "blessing?" It is a word often in our mouth, but how many words we make use of as found in the Scriptures, and hear others use too, of which we form no adequate conception, and even will not give ourselves the trouble of enquiring into; satisfying ourselves with some vague, loose idea, which after all is but the shallow refuge of our willing ignorance. What then are "blessings" in the Scriptural sense of the term? The word literally means things to be well spoken of, things

worthy of excellent mention; and, as applied to divine realities, things well spoken of by God himself, who sees the end from the beginning, and knows all things with the utmost perfection of knowledge. We may therefore consider that the word "blessing" means those things of which God himself speaks well. Whether therefore the word "blessings" refers to the view that God takes of them or to the view that we take of them, as enlightened by his grace, the simplest meaning of the term is things to be well spoken of, things worthy of adoration and praise. God speaks well of them; for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with these blessings, knows their value, perfectly understands the surpassing excellence of his own gifts; and we may be well assured that when he gave his only begotten Son, and blessed us with all spiritual blessings in him, he well knew the depth of his own love, the fulness of his own wisdom, the riches of his own grace, and that eternal state of glory into which he had determined to bring us. We may also observe that he is said to have "blessed us with all spiritual blessings *in Christ.*" The blessings in the mind of God were worthy of, and corresponding to the Son of his love in whom all these blessings centre. We cannot raise our thoughts too high upon this point; for whatever we may think or even desire, God's purposes of love outrun them all; for it is as the apostle has declared, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9.)

But take the word "blessings" as applicable to our thoughts and expression of them. They are things to be well spoken of by man, that is, regenerated man, and form a subject of grateful adoration and praise, not only for time but for eternity. These divine realities are indeed far out of the sight and out of the reach of the earthly mind of man. So far from speaking well of them, men for the most part rather speak ill



of them; and instead of pronouncing sovereign grace, discriminating favour, electing love, atoning blood, justifying righteousness to be blessings, would rather denounce them as pernicious notions, licentious opinions, and dangerous doctrines.

ii. But having given this glance at the meaning of the word "blessings," let us now look at the expression "spiritual." The apostle speaks of God having blessed us with all spiritual blessings. Fix your eye and heart therefore on that one word "spiritual." There are natural blessings, and these also are the gift of him in whom we live and move and have our being. Thus we find a distinction between the blessings which Isaac gave to Jacob and to Esau. To Jacob he gave spiritual blessings: "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." But he gave him also temporal blessings: "God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine." But you will observe that when Esau came, and cried out, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father," there was no blessing to give; for all his answer was, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven from above," and a promise of deliverance at some future time from Jacob's dominion. It is frequently said, and I said so myself a few minutes ago, that Isaac blessed Esau; but if you carefully examine the passage you will not find a word of blessing in it. (Gen. 27:27, 28, 38, 39.) Esau thus had favours without blessings—a part of the portion of Jacob, his earthly portion; for the dominion given to Jacob over peoples and nations, and the lordship over his brethren, with the attaching of a curse to all who cursed him and of a blessing to all who blessed him, put him, as heir, into possession of the spiritual blessings of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. (Gen. 12:3.) But Esau had his portion without the blessing of God

upon it. Thus, in a sense, the very "fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven" are only blessings to God's people. Others may have health and strength, worldly prosperity, and success in life; but they are not blessings in the true sense of the word, because God's hand is not seen or acknowledged in them. Nay, rather, the more they have of them, according to Job's description, the more they become mighty in power, the more their houses are safe from fear, the more they take the timbrel and harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ, and they spend their days in wealth, the more do they say unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." (Job. 21:7-14.)

And yet temporal blessings, though ever to be received by us with a thankful heart, are not those spoken of in our text. These are "spiritual blessings." What then may we understand by "spiritual blessings," as distinct from temporal? We may view them such, either as regards God the Giver or ourselves the receivers. Viewing him as the Giver, they are such as he who is a Spirit gives; blessings consistent with the character of God as a pure and holy Spirit, and therefore in themselves pure, holy and heavenly, suitable to our spiritual mind; and thus distinct from any sensations of the body, or any thoughts, desires, and feelings of our natural intellect. They are also spiritual in this sense, as being blessings which the Holy Ghost reveals to the soul and gives us a meetness to enjoy. But when we view them as regards us, the receivers, we may say that they embrace all the blessings and sure mercies of the everlasting covenant, all things that pertain to life and godliness; nor is there a single blessing stored up in the fulness of Christ not comprehended in them. Life eternal, pardon of sin, adoption into the family of God, sanctification, peace in its foundation and effects, and justification in all its blessedness, are folded in the bosom of these "spiritual blessings." O how short of all

these heavenly and abiding blessings are the greatest mercies and favours which we can receive in providence. What are health and strength, houses and lands, riches and honour, and all that earth can give of good or great—what are all compared with a good hope of eternal life, when our poor, vile body shall drop into its native dust?

iii. A word or two more to bring you into our text, though I shall have occasion to open it more fully as I go on: "*In heavenly places.*" We are said to be "Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." It is in the margin, "or *things,*" the reason being, because, in the original, the substantive is absent, and we have simply the adjective "heavenly," leaving us at liberty to supply "places," or "things," according to the context or analogy of faith. I believe our translators have well and wisely put "places," and I will show you briefly why. Our blessed Lord is in the heavenly places; he is gone up on high to sit at the right hand of God in the highest heaven; and as all our blessings are in him and he is in the heavenly places, and will be there till he comes a second time without sin unto salvation, all our spiritual blessings are in heavenly places, because they centre in him who is seated there in the fulness of his glory as the High Priest over the house of God.

Having thus taken you by the hand and led you to the brink of our text, let us now, with God's help and blessing, attempt to descend into these waters of Shiloah, which go softly, and drink of them as flowing full of sweetness and blessedness before our eyes in it.

Its main beauty and blessedness is, as I before pointed out, that God hath blessed us, already blessed us, with all spiritual blessings. Whatever spiritual blessing therefore there is in the hand of God to give or for the heart of man to receive, with that spiritual blessing you have been already

blessed if you are a saint and one of the faithful in Christ Jesus; for it is to such the epistle is written, and of such the apostle speaks in using the word "us." Now these spiritual blessings we may divide into two different classes. There are some blessings which are antecedent to the fall of man, and others which follow upon it.

iv. We must not suppose that God began to bless the church first when Adam fell, because we read in our text of his choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world. The spiritual blessings therefore with which God has blessed his people in heavenly places he gave to them in Christ before the foundation of the world; and therefore were evidently antecedent to the fall. Let me endeavour to explain this a little more fully, as the distinction which I have made may not at first sight be sufficiently plain. God the Father for ever loved the Church. Is not this evident not only from his own immutable character and the eternity of his Being, but from those wonderful words of our most gracious Lord in his intercessory prayer, "And hast loved them, as thou hast loved me?" (John 17:23.) The word "as" implies not only measure but duration, whether before time or after. When did the Father begin to love his dear Son? To that love there was, there could be, no beginning, for he was his eternal Son, and eternity knows neither beginning nor end. If God then loved the Church with the same love wherewith he loved his dear Son, it must have been a love from the same eternity. This love therefore was quite irrespective of what the Church might be or should be in a time state, unless you think that time alters, I might almost say, the very Being of God, for as "love," he is one pure Essence of love which knows neither variation, nor decline, for "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.)

1. Love, therefore, the love of God, irrespective of all issues

and consequences, was the first spiritual blessing wherewith he blessed the Church in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

2. But love, whether in God or man, is operative, that is, it goes forth and displays itself in fruits and effects. What then was the first effect and fruit of this love of God? Was it not this that he gave the Church to his dear Son, to be his bride and spouse? for God in loving the Church determined to make her a partaker of his own glory, to bring her to the enjoyment of himself; and the way that he chose to do so (and how faith approves of and embraces the way), was by making her a partaker of the glory of Christ as his only begotten Son. Is not this gospel doctrine, and in the fullest harmony with the words of our blessed Lord, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them 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." (John 17:9, 10.) Must we not then say that this love of God to the Church in his dear Son was a gift or blessing, antecedent to the fall and irrespective of it?

3. But there flows from this another consequence, if not altogether another blessing. When the Father had given the Church to his dear Son, and he had accepted her at his hands and loved her with the same love, for the Father and the Son are one in mind as much as they are one in essence, claiming her as his spouse and bride, the favour and approbation of the Father flowed forth to her, not only as he viewed her before he gave her to his dear Son, but as his bride and spouse. Let me illustrate this by a figure—a scriptural figure too, for our Lord speaks of "a certain king who made a marriage for his son." (Matt. 22:2.) A man of noble descent and large property wishes that his son and heir should marry for the continuation of the peerage and the

maintenance of the estates. Now there is a noble damsel in his eye, whom he would wish his son to have as the partner of his life; and as such, he loves her with the prospective view of her union with him. But it so happens, you will perceive that I am still continuing my figure, that the affections of the son fall upon the same object. He loves the very damsel whom his father had in his mind chosen for him. They meet, they love; a wedding takes place; she becomes his spouse. But now the love of the father flows out to her, not only as before from viewing her to be a suitable companion for his son before the marriage, but he loves her with an additional love as now brought into a more tender relationship to him as the wife and spouse of his own son. Is there not some analogy between this illustration and the love of God to the Church? He loves her because she is Christ's. She has become a daughter, as he addresses her in Psalm 45: "Hearken, O daughter." (Psa. 45:10.) We therefore read of God's making us "accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:6.)

Putting therefore these things together, you may see that there were three spiritual blessings antecedent to the fall and irrespective of it. The first is the love of God to the Church; the second is the gift of her to his dear Son; and the third is his love and approbation of her as his accepted spouse and bride.

v. But now let me point out some of those "spiritual blessings" which cannot be said to be altogether dependent upon, and yet are most blessedly suitable to, the reparation of the breach which the fall made between God and us; for we must ever bear in mind, that the fall of Adam broke asunder, so to speak, all intercourse and communion between man and his Maker. None who know the holiness of God and the evil of sin, can doubt that the Adam fall brought an awful bar between God and the Church; which had to be

repaired, made up, and the breach entirely and thoroughly healed, or the God of holiness and truth could never have received us into his own loving bosom, that we should spend in his presence a glorious eternity. God, therefore, not only blessed us with the spiritual blessings which I have described as antecedent to, and irrespective of the fall, but with those which are intimately connected with redemption—redemption, I need not intimate, being not required but by the fall. These blessings, therefore, are based upon the incarnation of his dear Son, and on the sacrifice which was to be offered on the cross by his precious bloodshedding and death.

Now as the work of grace upon the heart begins with a conviction of sin, these, though not the first in order, are the first spiritual blessings which are apprehended and embraced by faith. We come in by necessity. "God be merciful to me a sinner." "What shall I do to be saved?" "How shall I escape the wrath to come?"—these are the first feelings, these are the first anxious enquiries of an awakened sinner.

1. But what is the first blessing which we want to know? Is it not the full and free *forgiveness of sin*? Now see how kindly and graciously the Lord meets us with the very spiritual blessing so adapted to our mournful case, so suitable to our misery and woe, as justly condemned sinners before him: "In whom," that is in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace." (Eph. 1:7.) So then if we belong to that happy number who are "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus," they being the "we" to whom the apostle speaks, God hath blessed us, already blessed us with the forgiveness of our sins. All our sins were laid upon the head of our Surety: he bore them all in his body on the tree. He suffered here, that we might not suffer hereafter; he endured the pains of hell,

that he might give us the pleasures of heaven; he died in time, that we might not die to all eternity; and he rose again from the dead, that we might rise with him and sit down together with him in heavenly places. All this we have if we have union with Christ; for it is "in him," that is, by virtue of union with him, that we have "redemption through his blood." And observe how it all is, "according to the riches of his grace." O how rich that grace, how full even to overflowing with a tide of superabounding favour, that redemption, through the blood of Christ, should be as full and as complete as the fulness of the favour of God! If his grace be rich, how rich the redemption; if the redemption be rich, how rich the forgiveness which comes through that redemption; and O how suitable are these three rich blessings, grace, redemption, and forgiveness to hearts robbed, spoiled, and plundered by sin and Satan of everything that is good. But O how many of the dear family of God are deeply tried and sorely exercised upon this point, to believe in the remission of sin, that is, so to believe it as to have a sweet personal, experimental assurance that all their sins are pardoned. They seem able to receive and believe smaller favours, if I may use the expression, a less gift of grace; but they cannot rise up into the sweet persuasion that the great grace of forgiveness is theirs; nor can they, nor will they ever believe it till the Holy Ghost assures them of it, by bringing the testimony of pardoned sin into their heart. And yet could they but see, believe, and enjoy it, they are blessed, already blessed, with this best and greatest of personal favours, as one of those spiritual blessings with which God has blessed them in Christ. God has already forgiven them their sins, already put them away, already cast them behind his back, and will remember them no more. I know the weakness of our faith, and the miserable unbelief and despondency of our heart under the guilt of sin; nor would I lead any one a step further than God



has led him, or say a word to tempt any to presume; but this I may say to every one of you who has any spiritual mark of being a saint and a believer in Christ Jesus, that God has already blessed you with the forgiveness of sin, by giving you an interest in the redemption of his dear Son.

2. But now look at another spiritual blessing with which God has blessed his dear people in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He has *freely justified* them. Our blessed Lord wrought out for them a robe of righteousness. He obeyed the law on their behalf, bearing its penalty and enduring its curse, and has thus redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. (Gal. 3:10.) Yea, God himself "hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2. Cor. 5:21.) They are thus freely justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24.) His name is "The Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6); and "in him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." (Isa. 45:25.) It was a sense of this which made the Church of old rejoice and sing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." (Isa. 61:10.)

3. But what is the fruit and effect of these two spiritual blessings? The pardon of our sin and the justification of our persons, is to *give us peace* with God. There is no peace with God except so far as there is some sense of forgiven sin, and some gracious persuasion of being in a justified state. But these two blessings we cannot experimentally realise until God is pleased to reveal Christ to our soul, and to set him, so to speak, before our eyes as the Object of our faith. Then,

according to the measure of that faith, there is a reception of his precious blood into a living conscience, a taking hold of his righteousness, and thus having peace with God in believing. Does not the Lord say "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me?" To take hold of God's strength is to take hold of the strength of his grace in the work of redemption; to see and feel that the love displayed in it was, as the bride speaks, "strong as death"—so strong that "many waters could not quench it, neither the floods drown it." (Song Sol. 8:7.) Peace, then, as the fruit and effect of justifying righteousness, is also a spiritual blessing which God has blessed us with in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The apostle, therefore, in all his epistles prays for "grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ." It is a part of that kingdom of God which, as set up in the heart, is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17.) It is called "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7); and the apostle prays that "God would fill his saints with all joy and peace in believing;" for "he has called us to peace." (1 Cor. 7:15.) He is "himself the author of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33), and "would have it reign and rule in our hearts." (Col. 3:15.) It is indeed a most precious blessing, the dying legacy of our gracious Lord, of which he himself is the sum and substance, and which "he came and preached to us who were afar off." (Eph. 2:14, 17.) It is also the choicest fruit of justification: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1.) In some respects it seems almost the crown of all blessings; for if there be more in love to enjoy, there is more in peace to possess, a more tranquil happiness, which in its calm passiveness is almost sweeter than love in its warm activity.

4. Another spiritual blessing with which God has blessed us in

heavenly places in Christ Jesus is *reconciliation* unto himself. How strongly, how clearly, how blessedly does the apostle declare this vital truth: "And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight." (Col. 1:21, 22.) And again: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18.) How rich the grace, how wondrous the mercy, that God should have devised and accomplished the reconciliation to himself of enemies and aliens. And O in what a way! By the cross; thus slaying the enmity which had been introduced by sin: "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (Eph. 2:16.)

5. Now from this flows another blessing, a being *brought nigh unto God* by the blood of his dear Son: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who were afar off"—and O how far off! could any be farther than we?—"are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13.) We thus obtain *access* unto God; "for through him, that is, Christ, we both (that is, Jew and Gentile), have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 3:18.) The word "access" means liberty to approach him with all holy boldness, and come into his presence with acceptance. The word properly and literally signifies "introduction;" as if we were taken by the hand and led into the court to see the king face to face, and this without chilling fear: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." (Eph. 3:12.) What an unspeakable blessing it is to have access to God, so as to come into his presence with some measure of sweet freedom, holy liberty, and some intimation of his gracious favour; for without some degree of this, all is darkness,

condemnation, and death. But our blessed Lord having gone up on high, through the rent veil of his own flesh gives access to God, that we may venture into the holiest through the blood of Jesus; and thus find liberty of speech and power of utterance before the throne of grace. How blessed it is to have some measure of gracious boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. (Heb. 10:19, 20.)

But may I not well adopt the apostle's words? "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell" of all the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed his people in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

6. Yet must I mention one more: the sum and crown of all, *eternal life*. This God "promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2); and by the gospel he brings the hope of it into the heart. And may we not well say this is a spiritual blessing in heavenly places? for that is the very ground in which hope anchors, as entering into that within the veil. (Heb. 6:19.)

vi. But I now come to those striking and most expressive words, "*heavenly places*." You will not fail to have observed that we are blessed with all these spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and that therefore they are all safely stored up in Christ, far above the reach of all earthly vicissitudes. No storms ever reach that celestial atmosphere; no waves of time ever beat upon that glorious shore. Many are the storms which assail the saints of God here below; and the worst are from within. But these blessings are placed out of the reach of all these storms. The world with all its combined force, persecution in all its forms, Satan with all his assaults and all his temptations cannot touch these blessings.

But observe also that they are all stored up in *the Person of Christ*, and therefore are where he is—at the right hand of God. What an effect, what an influence have these things upon the heart when they are received by faith. What a fixing there is of the eye of faith upon the grand Object of faith at the right hand of the Father. What a looking to, what a believing in, what a laying hold of the Son of God in the highest heavens as the great High Priest over the House of God. What a daily, sometimes hourly, Object for faith is this risen, this glorified, this exalted Christ; and how at various times our faith is enabled to enter through the veil of earthly things, to pass through the clouds and mists that hover over this world, and to reach upward to that blessed spot where our great High Priest sits in his Deity and in his humanity, Immanuel, God with us. What a tendency this has also to raise up our affections to things above. This is the very spirit of the apostle's exhortation: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of the Father." (Col. 3:1.) If we look up to this risen, exalted, glorified Jesus, we see that God has blessed us already with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him. How, as favoured with a living faith, we see them stored up in the Person of the risen Son of God far beyond all the attacks of sin and Satan, all the malice and hatred of the world, and all the darkness and confusion of our miserable selves. As thus we view these things by the eye of faith, the heart goes forth in affection towards him in whom all these blessings centre; for they derive all their blessedness from being in him. What is love without the lover? What the marriage without the man? Thus, as if instinctively, as if intuitively, we know, we feel that as being in him they must come down from him. They are all stored up in him; they all centre in him; he is their giver; from him they must all be bestowed upon his poor, needy recipients; and there is, as it were, a double sweetness in them as being in him and

coming from him. There is thus established a blessed link of communication between the Lord and our souls, a spiritual intercourse, a holy communion, like Jacob's ladder, a going up and a coming down; an ascent of prayer and affection, of faith, hope, and love, up to the throne of God, and a coming down of his gracious presence and favour into the breast. We cannot look too much or too frequently, too prayerfully, too believingly, too affectionately to the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God; for he is there as our Advocate, as our Priest, as our Representative, as our King. Faith, in order to act, wants an Object to whom it may look, in whom it may believe, on whom it may hang, to whom it may cleave. Without this Object on which to fix its eyes, faith seems to wander about without purpose, end, or object; and all its labours and toil bring nothing into the heart but darkness, barrenness, and death. But when it fixes its eyes upon the Lord of life and glory in the highest heavens, and goes forth in living actings upon him, it has that upon which it can feed, embrace, and enjoy. And as all spiritual blessings are stored up in him in these heavenly places, out of his fulness we receive them through this medium—the medium of faith. We have not then to muddle and grope here below to seek after and look for blessings in ourselves or others, but we have to look up by the eye of faith; see every spiritual blessing which our souls can desire stored up in the fulness of the risen Son of God, and by faith and prayer draw them down into our breast.

But the margin reads, "things," "heavenly things;" and I have already intimated that both "things" and "places" are admissible, though I prefer the textual rendering "places." Yet we may devote a few words to the expression "heavenly things." The word implies that every spiritual blessing is of a heavenly nature, redolent of the very breath of heaven. From heaven is their origin; for like the beams of the sun and the

showers of the air, from heaven they come down. "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness." (Isa. 45:8.) "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven." (Isa. 55:10.) And as they come down from heaven, so they rise up to heaven. The apostle puts them both in one verse—lodges both in the bosom of one exhortation: "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." (Col. 3:1.) What are "things above" but "heavenly things?" What is "Christ, at the right hand of God" but Christ in the "heavenly places?" Is not all heavenly where he is, and with which he has to do? Through them also, as brought into the heart by a divine power, there is communicated a meetness for heaven; and as heavenly things are only in heavenly places, whether we adopt the rendering "things" or "places," either word has heaven for its substance, its element, and its eternal home.

II. But let me now pass on to show what was God's *aim, end, and object* in blessing us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It was "that we should be *holy and without blame before him in love.*"

i. God means to make us partakers of his holiness, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is impossible for an unholy soul to enter the courts of heavenly bliss. There dwell in the light which no man can approach unto a holy Father, a holy Son, and a holy Ghost, Israel's Triune God. There dwells holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. Holy is heaven's air, holy are heaven's employments: all there is one eternal, unmixed atmosphere of holiness. Unless therefore we are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light by being made partakers of God's holiness, we never can enter that celestial atmosphere: we shall never dwell in the presence of God for evermore.

Into that celestial city "there shall in no wise enter anything which defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." John tells us what he saw in vision concerning this holy city: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:2.) The Church is here represented, as "a bride adorned for her husband;" and that she may be adorned for such a bridegroom she must shine forth not only in all the splendour of his glorious righteousness, but, according to the promise, in all "the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning." (Psa. 110:3.) Our own holiness is not sufficient. The holiness which God requires and the holiness which he gives is one "without blame." Now who can say of any man, whatever his life and conduct be, whatever be his spiritual aspirations, godly walk, consistent conversation, affectionate desires, living faith, or tender love, that he stands holy and without blame before God? Can you say so of yourself? And if this be true of you, as you know it is, so is it of all the people of God. In order, therefore, to give them that holiness in which they might stand without blame before him, God did three things for them.

1. First, he sanctified them by separating them unto himself from all eternity and giving them to his dear Son that he might be their holiness. Thus the Lord, speaking of Israel of old, says, "Thy beauty was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee." (Ezek. 16:14.) We are, therefore, said to be sanctified by the will of the Father: "By which will we are sanctified" (Heb. 10:10); and Christ is declared to be "of God made unto us sanctification" as well as "wisdom, righteousness, and redemption." (1 Cor. 1:30.) This runs in accordance with Paul's word: "For if the firstfruits be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches." (Rom. 11:16.) Christ is the firstfruit, for he is



become "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20); and Christ is the root, for he is "the root of Jesse, which is to stand for an ensign of the people." (Isa. 11:10.) God's will determined everything. God willed that we should be holy, and by that will he made us holy. Just as when God willed earth into being, earth came into being; so when God willed his people to be holy, he made them holy by the power of that will; and thus, by being separated unto himself to be a holy people, they were sanctified by the will of the Father.

2. But, secondly, they are sanctified also by the blood of the Son: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." (Heb. 13:12.) Thus Jesus sanctified his people by his own blood, that is, effectually cleansed them from all their pollutions, freed them from all their guilty stains, and presented them before God spotless and without blame, as being perfectly washed in the atoning fountain opened in him for all sin and uncleanness.

3. But this does not give them personal holiness, holiness of heart. There is, therefore, a holiness which the Holy Ghost gives at regeneration, by renewing them in the spirit of their mind, communicating a new nature, and sanctifying them inwardly by the communication of divine life. This is "the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (1 Cor. 3:10.)

We thus see that they are holy by the will of the Father by election, holy by the blood of the Son by redemption, holy by the work of the Holy Ghost by regeneration.

ii. And as they are thus holy, so are they "*without blame before him.*" As the work of a Triune God, each and every part of this holiness is perfect, and therefore without blame

before God. Perfect in his own eternal will; perfect in the work of redemption; perfect, as far as it goes, the work of regeneration. God views his people in Christ. Though he sees our sins and chastises us for them, yet he views our persons as we stand "accepted in the beloved;" and viewing us as we stand not in ourselves, but in Christ, he views us without blame before him.

iii. And that, "*in love,*" his own love, wherewith he hath loved us; and in that love which he himself sheds abroad in the heart; for love is the fulfilling of the law, and therefore an eminent branch of Christian holiness. And in that great and glorious day when Christ who is our life shall appear, and all his saints shall appear with him in glory, then will the love of the Church be fully perfected, and she will stand before the throne holy and without blame before him in love.

Have you ever considered these things? Were you ever led into them, into their meaning, their spirituality, their power, their personal effect and influence? What does your religion consist in? Is it merely in finding in yourself a few shallow evidences, or does it spring out of any manifestation of the Son of God to your soul, any application of his blood and love and grace to your heart? Do you ever rise up out of the refuse of self into the goodness, mercy, and grace of God as manifested in the Person and work of Jesus? Do you never find a solemn taking up of your soul into the arms of mercy and a laying of it upon the bosom of a risen Christ? a breathing into your heart of the very Spirit and presence and grace of Christ, so as to give you a measure of sweet enjoyment of the things of God in your own bosom? Now you may look and look again at your evidences; you may try to take the very best of them, such as loving the brethren, receiving the truth, walking consistently, being a member of a church, the opinion that good people form of you; and you

may keep looking and looking at, and into these evidences, some of which are true and Scriptural, such as loving the brethren, receiving the love of the truth, and leading a godly life, but others shallow or even deceptive, till your very eyes fail. With all your looking you will never rise much beyond doubt or fear. Have you not then something beyond evidences, some living faith in the Son of God, some love to his dear name, some anchoring within the veil, some love of God shed abroad in your heart, some manifestation of Christ, some union and communion with the Son of God? Evidences are good in their way: they are, according to my figure, like milestones upon the road; we are glad to see and count the milestones, especially when we are weary. It is good to see that the road we are travelling on is the right road, and how far we are advanced in it. But a man would be sadly deceived if he mistook a milestone for his own home, or lay down to sleep under it. Press on, press on; don't be satisfied with a few evidences. Let nothing satisfy you but the blood of Christ sprinkled upon your conscience, the love of God shed abroad in your heart, peace and joy in believing, with blessed views of the Son of God as of God made unto you wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And see the blessedness of our subject; God hath blessed you, if indeed you believe in his dear Son, with all spiritual blessings already in Christ Jesus. If you are a saint and a faithful one, he has only to open his hand to satisfy the desire of you as of every other living thing. The blessings are all in Christ: they are in him already. They have to be received out of him; and we receive them by the hand of faith. Instead then of sitting down contented with your evidences, and making a Christ out of them, worshipping them as if they were your God, is it not more consistent with the experience of living souls, with the directions of God's word, with the preaching of the apostles and of all godly men of all ages, nay, I might add, even with the secret, inmost convictions of your own

conscience to go to the fountain-head to receive of his fulness and to drink pure streams out of him, who hath said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink? He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

III.—But to pass on to our third and last point. All this is in sweet *accordance with God's eternal choice* of his people to the enjoyment of these heavenly blessings: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

This firm, immutable purpose of God gives a fixedness to the tenure. Fixity of tenure gives value to an estate. Who would buy an estate upon an uncertain tenure or an unsound title? Fixedness of tenure, soundness of title, give that stability which constitutes worth. So it is in these divine realities: they are eternal fixtures, not depending upon the changeable concerns of time, but fixed by the absolute decree of God. In this consists their main blessedness. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

Observe, it is "*in him*." All is in Christ. If you are blessed with all spiritual blessings, it is only "in Christ" you are so blessed. If you were chosen before the foundation of the world, it was only "in Christ" that you were chosen. He is our covenant Head. What we are we are only in him. There is nothing in self: no fixedness there. All is fluctuating here below; all is uncertain as regards man. Certainty is with God; and the fixedness of God's purposes is our grand, our only support. Thus the doctrine of election received into the heart diffuses a sacred blessedness over the whole truth of God, for it gives stability to it. It is not a dry doctrine which men may toss about from hand to hand like a tennis ball; it is not an article of a creed written down in church articles, or a theory to be argued by divines. Nor is it a mere loose, floating idea gathered from a few dim and doubtful passages of God's word. It is no ignis fatuus, no meteor light dancing over

morasses and swamps. It is a steady light set by the hand of God in the Scriptures, as he set of old lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth. It therefore diffuses its rays over the whole of God's truth. For it is "in Christ" his people were chosen, and therefore election being in Christ, it is reflected with all the beams of the Sun of Righteousness upon every gospel truth. There is not a single gospel truth, or a single spiritual blessing, which does not derive its blessedness from its connection with the Person and work of the Son of God; and what is true of all, is true of this, that the blessedness of election is because it is in Christ.

But some may say "these things are hard to believe." They are very hard to believe, for our unbelieving heart finds it very hard to believe anything that is for our good. We can believe Satan's lies with great readiness; we can give an open, willing ear to anything which our evil heart suggests. But to believe God's truths so as to enter into their beauty and blessedness, to feel their quickening power and live under their cheering, invigorating influence, this is another matter. But where is the life of our religion when these things are taken away from it? Take, if you could take—God be praised it is beyond the reach of human hand!—but take away that solemn fact, that God has blessed the Church with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, where would there be room for any blessing to rest upon our soul? How could I be blessed to you this morning in speaking, how could you be blessed by a word falling with power in hearing? Why, any sweet promise that comes rolling into your breast, any lifting up of the light of God's countenance in seasons of darkness and adversity, any liberty in prayer, any looking up and receiving out of Christ's fulness,—all hang upon this grand point, the blessings wherewith God hath already blessed us in Christ Jesus. So that all we have to do—and it is a great thing to do—God

alone can enable us to do it—is to receive what God has been pleased so mercifully to give; and as he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, to feel their power, to enjoy their sweetness, and to know for ourselves by the sealing of the Spirit that he has blessed us, even us, and that with life for evermore.