

The Branch of the Lord Beautiful and Glorious to Them that are Escaped of Israel

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, June 20, 1869

"In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel, and it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem." Isaiah 4: 2, 3

The prophetic declaration of the Old Testament Scriptures are often very obscure, and, in consequence difficult to understand. For this obscurity there are various causes; but it will suffice for the present to mention two:

1. The apparently *ambiguous* language in which they are couched; so that at times it seems uncertain whether we are to understand them in a literal, or in a spiritual sense. Take, for instance, such a passage as this, which you will find in the chapter which I read this morning: "And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations." (Isaiah 61:4.) Is that prophetic declaration to be interpreted literally or spiritually? Will the time ever come when in the land of Canaan, which now lies waste and desolate, there will be a building up of the old wastes? Will there be a literal raising up of the former desolations? Will the returning Jews actually repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations? And will Palestine be again filled with flourishing towns and villages, so as to be restored to its ancient populousness and prosperity? Or are we entirely to ignore such an explanation,

call it carnal and earthly, unworthy of the spiritual meaning of Scripture, and interpret the prediction wholly in harmony with the preceding verses, which are undoubtedly claimed by our Lord himself as descriptive of his work as anointed by the Spirit of the Lord? If so, you would probably interpret the desolations as signifying the desolations of the soul, and the waste places that are found in spiritual experience as built up and repaired by Christ being anointed "to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." (Isaiah 61:3.) If, then, you adopt the literal meaning, you might find a difficulty in reconciling it with the spiritual, as explained by the Lord himself; but if, on the other hand, you wholly discard the literal meaning, you might find a difficulty in another direction in so positively denying the literal interpretation of the word of God, for you might carry out the same principle of interpretation in all other passages of similar import, and thus overthrow the literal meaning of God's word altogether. My own belief is, that the literal meaning of the prophecies does not contradict their spiritual interpretation, but that each has its place; as was the case with the prophecies concerning Christ, of which those that predicted his literal birth at Bethlehem, his being born of a pure Virgin, his literal sufferings, death, and resurrection have their place in the prophetic page, and were as much fulfilled as those which spoke of his spiritual sufferings and of the travail of his soul. Is not Isaiah 53 eminent instance of both the literal and spiritual meaning of prophecy meeting and harmonising in our blessed Lord? And why should this not be the case also in other predictions now apparently ambiguous and obscure?

2. But there is another reason for their obscurity. Very many

of these prophetic declarations have *not yet* received their *fulfilment*; and therefore, until fulfilled, they will always be obscure. Look, for instance, at the many intimations that were given in the Old Testament Scriptures of Christ's sufferings and death to which I have just alluded. Were they understood by the Old Testament believers before the coming of Christ? Could they understand, for instance, and explain Psalms 22, 40, 69, or Isaiah 53, as we understand and explain them now? But when the man of sorrows came, and Messiah appeared as a suffering Messiah, then those Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of his sufferings became plain and clear. So it will be doubtless with many prophetic declarations which are now obscure. They will one day be fulfilled to the very letter. There will be no uncertainty or discrepancy then between the literal and spiritual interpretation; but each will be seen to have its own distinct fulfilment, and all that obscurity which now arises from the apparently ambiguous language in which they are couched will then perfectly disappear.

"But," it may be asked, "If this be the case; if you say these prophetic declarations are so obscure, why do you preach from them? Why not leave them in their original obscurity? Do you think you can explain them, or give us any understanding of their true meaning? Had you not better leave them, if they are so obscure as you make them out to be, and take some plainer and simpler text in which there is no such obscurity?" Let me then answer this objection. These prophetic declarations may be obscure as regards their fulfilment prophetically, and yet may contain a vast deal of spiritual instruction. We may not understand them altogether in their prophetic, and yet may find great instruction in them in their spiritual and experimental aspect. In endeavouring, therefore, this morning, to open up the words of our text, I shall leave aside altogether their prophetic aspect, and

confine myself to their spiritual and experimental meaning; and I hope you may be able, with God's help and blessing, to gather some instruction, or encouragement, or consolation, or even warning, if need be, or reproof, or admonition which may benefit your soul; for God's word is written with such infinite wisdom and depth of spiritual meaning, that, if we are taught by the Spirit, we shall always find something in it suitable to our case. Bear this in mind, then, in reading the word of prophecy, that whatever may be the fulfilment of these prophetic declarations in times to come, there will be not change as regards the fundamental verities of the everlasting gospel. Grace will always be grace, as the heart of man will always be the heart of man. Whether the Jews be restored to their own land or not, whether converted to Christ or not, God's dealings with his people, when all these prophecies are being actually fulfilled, will always resemble his dealings with them in every age and every clime. Without redemption by the blood of Christ, without regeneration by the Holy Spirit, without faith, and hope, and love in the Lord Jesus, of what avail would be any literal restoration of the literal Israel? They would be Jews still with all their present unbelief, infidelity, and enmity against the Son of God. Whether, then, there be a literal fulfilment of our text or not, does not at all affect the spiritual instruction contained in it; for in this sense, these prophetic declarations have a daily and continual fulfilment in the soul of the believer from age to age and generation to generation, though they wait the future for their complete fulfilment. It is this peculiar feature of the prophetic Scriptures which makes them so edifying and instructive, even to those who are much in the dark as to their strictly prophetic meaning, and before whose minds the question rarely comes whether they are not as full of prophecy as they are of promise.

With these hints, which you can consider at your leisure, and

which I assure you will both bear and reward your prayerful examination and meditation, I shall now take you, as the Lord may enable, into the bosom of our text; and in so doing, I shall

I.—*First*, endeavour to trace out the *character* as described by the prophet in the words before us; in which we find four marks stamped upon him, which I shall examine one by one in the following order: 1. He is *written* among *the living* in Jerusalem. 2. He is one of "*the escaped* of Israel." He is "*left* in Zion and *remaineth* in Jerusalem." 4. He shall be called "*holy*."

II.—My *second* point will be, to open, as far as I am enabled, who this "*Branch of the Lord*" is, to show *how* and why he is "*beautiful and glorious*," and what is "*the fruit of the earth*" which is "*excellent and comely* for them that are escaped of Israel."

I.—You will perceive that the words of the text begin with an expression, which is very common in the prophecies of the Old Testament, "In that day." My time will not allow me to explain at any length the meaning of the expression. I shall, therefore, merely observe, that very great things are said of that day in the prophetic Scriptures; that it embraces things of judgment and things of mercy; is a day of great darkness (Amos 5:20), and a day of great light (Isaiah 30:26); a day of tribulation and anguish as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), and a day of deliverance, joy, and singing, as a day of manifested salvation. (Isaiah 26:1.) But why should the Scriptures speak so much of that day, and use such different language of the things which are to be accomplished in it? Because with all this apparent difference, if not discrepancy of meaning, there is a primary leading idea which distinguishes this day from all other days. It is the day of the

Lord inasmuch as it is the day in which the Lord displays his power. And thus, as he displays his power both in judgment and mercy, both in condemnation and salvation, it is his day, whether it be to pull down or build up, to kill or make alive, to destroy or to save. But observe, also, that as it is "the day of the Lord" with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8), it cannot be measured by time. Thus, whether that day be a day of twenty-four hours, or a day of weeks, or a day of years; whether it be the present day or a future day, *that* is the day of the Lord to every man's soul in which the Lord works with any degree of power. In fact, the whole of this present dispensation is but one day, as the Apostle speaks: "Behold now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2); meaning, thereby, not that there is to every man a day of grace which he may use or abuse, as his free will may enable him, but that this whole time of Christ's present intercession is the accepted time, the day of salvation spoken of by the prophet. (Isaiah 49:8.) But in a spiritual and experimental sense, to every saved soul there comes a day, which is to him the day of the Lord, and to him a day of days, inasmuch as the Lord signalises and distinguishes it by the putting forth of his almighty power, whether it be to pull down or build up, wound or heal, apply the law or bring home the gospel. We shall see, by-and-by, as the Lord may lead us into our subject, what is done in that day in a way of mercy and deliverance. But I must first, as I proposed, trace out the character of whom our text specially speaks as bearing stamped upon him four distinct marks.

i. The first mark that I shall endeavour to unfold is, that he is "*written among the living* in Jerusalem." If you will refer to the margin, which generally gives the literal meaning of the original, and is thus often more correct than the rendering found in the text, you will see it is "to life." He is written unto

life. In other words, his name is written in the Lamb's book of life. To write his name in the book of life, was the first act of grace conferred upon him. Now it is a very solemn thought, and one which deeply concerns every one in this congregation, that if our names are not written in the book of life, we shall be cast into the lake of fire, according to that solemn testimony in the Revelation, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Rev. 20:12, 15.) In the same book we have a description given of a holy city, the new Jerusalem, and it is declared of it: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev. 21:27.) Of what amazing consequence then it is to know whether our names are written therein or not. You may wish to have some intimation or indication that your name is in that book. Is there any means of knowing it? Are its leaves so folded from all sight or observation in this life, that we must wait for eternity to look into it? If it may be known in this life, must an angel bring down the book of life and open its leaves; or take us up to the third heaven to look upon the writing? Paul, writing to the Philippians, speaks of Clement and others his fellow labourers, whose names were in the book of life. (Phil. 4:3.) It appears then Paul knew that not only his own name, but that of Clement and others, were in that book. But how can that be known? By such marks as are given in our text, and especially by their being "written among the *living* in Jerusalem."

If we adopt the literal interpretation of Jerusalem, as

prophetically the city of their local habitation, or view it spiritually as representing the Jerusalem which is above and the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26), it will not much affect this particular point, which is, that "they are written among the living;" in other words, are inscribed on the roll of those who possess the life of God in their souls. Now this possession of divine and spiritual life flows from that first act of grace of which I have spoken, as writing their names in the book of life. Because they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and life was given to them in him, as their covenant Head, they are quickened into divine life, each as and when the set time comes. In the book of life their names were written from all eternity, before they had birth or being, as our Lord beautifully speaks both of himself and them in Psalm 139: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them." (Ps. 139:16.) As the eyes of the Father saw the substance of Christ's humanity, the body which he had prepared for him (Heb. 10:5) whilst yet imperfect, that is, not yet assumed in the womb of the Virgin, so the members of his mystical body were written in God's book, the book of life, and "what days they should be fashioned," (margin,) that is, brought into both natural and spiritual existence, were all appointed, when as yet there was none of them in actual being. And as according to the fore-knowledge of God and his predestinating will, his dear Son in due time assumed that humanity into union with his own divine Person, thus fore-viewed, so are his mystical members quickened into spiritual life, each at the appointed season. We see, therefore, a connection between being "written to life," and being "written among the living," according to the two meanings of the words which I have given from the text and the margin, and that from time to time the names of those who are in the book of life are, as it were, copied out of

it into the book of the living; this being so to speak, the roll-call of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in their time and state. This life, by which they thus live unto God, is the express gift of Christ, according to his own words: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." (John 17:2.) Those, then, whose names are in the book of life, being in Christ by an eternal union, though dead in sin as the consequence of the Adam-fall, were mystically quickened together with him when God raised him from the dead, and are actually quickened when in due time life is breathed into their dead souls, out of the fulness of the Son of God. Then, and not till then, they may be said to live, as is beautifully opened in Ezekiel 16 where, when the infant is cast out in the open field to the loathing of its person in the day it is born, the husband of the soul is represented as passing by, and saying unto it, "Live." It was with him the time of love, as he speaks: "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." (Ezek. 16:8.) It is this word of the Lord, "Live," which communicates life, for it is by the power of his word entering the heart through the animating breath of the blessed spirit that the soul lives and stands, so to speak, on its feet. (Ezek. 37:9, 10.) Until then our souls are quickened into divine life by the power of the word, and the invincible energy of the Holy Ghost, we know nothing of the movements, breathings, actings, and exercises of those who are written among the living in Jerusalem; and therefore, whatever our notions may be about election, however fluent our tongue, or strong our confidence, we have, at present, no scriptural evidence of our names being in the book of life. But when divine life enters the soul out of the fulness of the Son of God, there comes together with it an indication, an

intimation, a testimony more or less clear, according to the measure in which it is felt of our being possessed of this new and heavenly life; for it is with the new-born soul as with the living infant, distinguished from the still-born babe, that where there is life there are movements of life; there is breathing, there is crying, there is getting near the mother, there is drawing the milk from her bosom, all which are proofs and indications of life in the child born alive, as contrasted with the want of breath, life, and movement in the babe that is dead. But I must not keep you longer upon this point, as it is so plain and obvious; and as there is so much other important matter in my text to lay before you.

ii. The second mark in the character traced out by the Holy Ghost as distinctive of Him to whom the Branch of the Lord is beautiful and glorious is, that he is one of "*the escaped of Israel.*" This is the point which I shall chiefly dwell upon, as his most important and distinctive feature, touching upon the other two marks in his character as subsidiary. He is said, then, to be one of the "escaped of Israel."

Battles in ancient times were very sanguinary. They took no prisoners and gave no quarter; and as men fought hand to hand, foot to foot, and shoulder to shoulder, with sword and spear, with little generalship and no such military manoeuvres as are practicable only with disciplined troops, they being only raw levies, battles in those days were attended with very great bloodshed; and, speaking comparatively, very few escaped from the field of battle. There were so few indeed who escaped unhurt from the field of a well contested battle, that there is a particular word for them in the Hebrew language; and it is here made use of, being well rendered in our admirable translation, "the escaped." You may see then how few really escaped death on the field of battle, when a certain name was attached to

them as designating the happy few who came off alive, when their fellows in arms fell in the general slaughter. As if, then, to show how few they are who, as saved from the general overthrow of mankind, are written among the living in Jerusalem, the Holy Ghost has used that peculiar word, and designated them here "the escaped of Israel," as if there were as few spiritually who escaped out of the general wreck and sweeping destruction of the fall as there were few that escaped out of those bloody battles of old.

Let me now then direct your attention particularly to the word "escaped," as I have explained it; and taking the idea of a sanguinary battle, or some general and signal overthrow, as of Sodom, for the original word is used of both, let us see what those who are written among the living in Jerusalem do not escape and what they do escape; as by viewing their history and experience under these two distinct aspects, we may gather up, with God's help and blessing, a clearer idea of what grace has rescued them from, supported them under, and delivered them out of. When a sailor escapes shipwreck, when a soldier escapes with his life from the field of battle, when in a city taken by storm a few escape the edge of the sword, it is evident that they all have passed through dangers and perils which threatened them with destruction, and from which they have been miraculously rescued. Thus it is with "the escaped of Israel." In escaping with life, they do not escape the things which threaten life, or bring with them danger and sorrow.

1. They do not then escape the *troubles, sorrows, and afflictions* of this life. Nay, they have rather a larger share of them than others. God's people, besides their spiritual troubles, which are peculiar to the elect of God, have usually a larger share of worldly sorrows than those who have their portion in this life. And, indeed, it seems almost

indispensable for their safe walking and their happily reaching the heavenly shore, that they should be well weighted, well ballasted, and well afflicted, that they might instrumentally be preserved from the love and spirit of the world, and those innumerable evils which drown them in destruction and perdition. You complain sometimes of your temporal troubles; how bitter is your daily cup; how you seem even naturally to have heavier afflictions than your neighbours. But how very rarely are you led to see the benefits and blessings couched in them. You murmur, you fret, you rebel, you think yourself very hardly dealt with on account of these continued afflictions. But are there not moments with you, though perhaps rare, when you can bless God for laying upon you his heavy hand as regards the body, or the family, or circumstances, as well as bringing upon you tribulation of soul? Do you not find a benefit couched in all these painful afflictions, and do they not produce in you, through divine grace, a weaning of spirit, a separation from the world, a sense that this is not your rest nor home? Have you not found your soul more lively, your conscience more tender, your heart more drawn up in faith and love when you have been pressed down by trouble and sorrow, and had more real access unto, and communion with, the Lord of life and glory? Many times is the soul brought near unto the Lord by the weight of temporal afflictions, as feeling that none but he can support it under them.

2. Nor do they escape the *scorn of men*, the scourge of the tongue, the arrow of slander, the back-blow of calumny, the opposition of sinners, and sometimes also that of saints. If they did, they could have neither their Master's portion, nor their Master's blessing. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." (Matt. 5:11.)

3. Nor do they escape the *snare of Satan* ever spread to entangle their feet, or his fiery darts shot into their soul, or the continual means used by him to draw them from the strait and narrow path into the broad road. If he tempted the Head he will tempt the members; but the promise is, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." (Rom. 16:20.) And again, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

4. Nor do they escape the *workings of unbelief*; of doubt and fear, of guilt and bondage, of inward condemnation and shame, nor all those exercises which are a part of our experience by the way, and which God overrules in a wonderful way for our soul's good. In fact, there is scarcely a sin, or a temptation, or a peril, or a snare which takes captive and drowns men in destruction and perdition which they have not a taste, a sight, or a sense of enough to make them see and sometimes tremblingly feel that grace, and grace alone, can either keep them from it, forgive them for it, or deliver them out of it.

iii. But what are the ills and evils which they *do* escape?

1. First, they escape the *wrath of God* that burns as a consuming fire. Here they resemble Noah, who escaped the deluge by "being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." (Heb. 11:7.) How small a remnant escaped in that day when as Peter speaks: "Few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water." (1 Pet. 3:20.) They resemble also Lot, who escaped out of Sodom when that city was burnt with fire and brimstone from heaven; and the early Christians of whom we

read in Church history, that warned by the Lord's words, "Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains," they fled out of the city at the last siege of Jerusalem, and thus escaped the sword of the Romans.

But what makes them escape the wrath of God? A sense of the wrath of God being let down into their consciences. No man escapes the wrath of God who does not flee from the wrath of God. No one escaped the deluge but by being warned of the deluge. Lot escaped the flames of Sodom by being warned of the judgment of God upon Sodom. So the escaped of Israel escape the wrath of God by being warned in their consciences of what that wrath is, by having some drops of it let down into their souls, whereby they see what **an God is an a [???** broken law, and how his vengeance will burn to the uttermost against every sinner whom he finds out of Christ at the great and awful day.

2. Again, they escape the *lot of the Pharisee*. There is nothing more dangerous than a proud, self-righteous, pharisaical spirit, for nothing sets us farther from the promises and blessings of the gospel. But this spirit they escape by having deep discoveries of the evils of their heart, so that they cannot boast of self, but feel all their righteousness to be as filthy rags, and that so far as they stand in self out of, and apart from Christ, they stand before God in all their nakedness, guilt, and shame. When deeply exercised with in-dwelling sin, they do not often see any benefit arising out of it; and yet by these discoveries and exercises they instrumentally escape the pride and self-righteousness of the Pharisee and perishing with a false hope.

3. Again, they escape the *vain confidence* and presumptuous assurance of the wretched antinomian, who trusts to and

hangs upon dead, dry, and naked doctrine, without knowing anything of the sweetness of experimental truth in his soul. No living soul, no tried, tempted, distressed and exercised child of God, can trust to cold, naked doctrine. This does not arise from want of faith or knowledge, want of searching the Scriptures, bowing the knee in secret, or frequenting the house of prayer, for in all these things they are both diligent and earnest. They believe all the doctrines of the gospel as firmly as those who make all their boast in them; they receive them as precious truths; and there are times and seasons when they feel the sweetness and power of them in their heart. But they must be to them something more than doctrines to do their souls any real good. They must know something more of election than seeing it revealed in the first chapter of the Ephesians, something more of predestination than reading of it in Romans 8, and something more of redemption by the blood of Christ, than by reading of it in Revelation 5, as a part of the new song. They must know the application of these things with power to their souls; and they see and feel too, that these truths of the gospel are not mere doctrines to fill the head, but precious truths of God to comfort and encourage the heart.

4. They escape also the *love and spirit of the world*, with the love of riches which is the root of all evil, and tempting and encouraging many a fair and once promising professor to put away a good conscience, often leads him concerning faith to make shipwreck. It is a solemn thought that so few escape with their life; and well may we cry aloud to all who seem anxious about their souls as the angels said to Lot, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." (Gen. 19:17.) The universal testimony of the word of God is to the fewness of the saved, compared with the number of the lost; and this should make every one who is concerned

about his immortal soul beg of the Lord that he may have some clear testimony that he is amongst those happy few.

iv. But what is the effect of this escaping for life? That he is one of those who are "*left in Zion*" and "*remain in Jerusalem.*"

God's people are, if I may use the expression, a circle within a circle: they are a people taken out of a people. Thus, not to mention the vast crowd of the openly profane, there is the wide circle of the professing generation—that is the outer circle; and then within this there is the inner circle of God's living family. It is true of them, as the apostle speaks, "They are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children," (Rom. 9:6, 7,) for there is an Israel after the flesh and an Israel after the spirit; and it is to the latter that the people of God belong. They are therefore called "a remnant according to the election of grace." (Rom. 11:5.) The apostle, to show this, cites the testimony of Isaiah: "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved," (Rom. 9:27,) that is a remnant only out of a number as the sand on the sea-shore. Those, therefore, who are "written among the living in Jerusalem" and are "the escaped of Israel," are spoken of here as "left in Zion" when all the rest have been swept away into destruction. They are elsewhere compared to gleaning grapes when the vintage is done, and to two or three olive berries left in the top of the tree after the whole of the crop has been gathered: "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel." (Isa. 17:6.) Let us not think, then, that saving religion is such an easy matter, and that multitudes are going

to heaven, but rather seek to have some clear evidence in our own bosom that we are among the escaped of Israel and the left in Zion.

2. And they "*remain in Jerusalem.*" Others fall into error: they escape it by that anointing which teacheth them of all things and is truth and no lie, and abide by truth because they know it by divine teaching and divine testimony, and because it has made them free. Others fall into open sin and disgrace the cause; these are kept more or less by the power of God, for the promise is, that sin shall not have dominion over them. Others who once promised well sooner or later are overcome by the love of the world, fall back into it, or if they keep up their outward profession, have but a name to live when they are dead. But these remain in Jerusalem, the city of the living God, because they "are written amongst the living in Jerusalem." There is a Jerusalem above, the mother of us all, and to that new Jerusalem they belong. They are the sons and daughters who suck at her breasts; she nurtured them and cherished them in their infancy and youth, and they abide by her in their old age. It is true that a child of God who has tasted and felt the power of truth in his own soul, had the love of God shed abroad in his heart, and felt a spirit of love to the Lord's people as seeing in them the image of Christ, may be often sadly tried and tempted to give all up, may sink at times almost into despair as regards his own state and standing, and similarly may, by various circumstances that may arise, be strongly tempted to withdraw from the people of God. But "No," he says: "I can never give up truth, nor cast away my hope, nor leave the family of God. For what would become of me if I were to do any of these things? I must be a poor, wandering outcast, going here and there without home, companion, or friend, till I drop down and die. I must keep to God's truth; for nothing else can save my soul; nothing else speak liberty to my

heart. I must abide also by God's people: they are sometimes very rough and rugged, and often very hard and fractious to deal with: and many a sleepless night or anxious day have I passed from some of their cruel wounds. But I cannot give them up, for after all they are the excellent of the earth in whom is all my delight." May I not speak freely on this point both from my own experience and from what I have seen and witnessed in other churches, that many a member of a Church and many a pastor has had more trouble arising from Church matters, and the fractious, inconsistent, peevish, obstinate, and determined party spirit of members, than from any other source of trouble, except his own personal salvation? Yet with all that in them which is so trying, we cannot give the people of God up. Shall we leave the Church of God, renounce all further intercourse or connection with his dear family, and go back into the world which we profess to have left, abandon truth, and embrace error? Do we not almost shudder at the very thought of all this as if it would be rank apostasy? And do we not feel that by so doing we should be sealing our own condemnation both for time and eternity? Whatever, therefore, be the consequences, whatever be the trials, the exercises, the difficulties connected with the cause and service of God, stand fast and hard by God's truth, by God's people, God's servants, God's house, God's ways, and God's word, and you will find in the end the benefit of it.

They are said to be "*holy*," because the various things through which they pass have a sanctified effect upon their hearts, lips, and lives. If God work with a divine power in the heart of his people, it is to make them be something different from what they were before, to sanctify them for his own honour and glory, and to do something in them and for them, that shall be to his praise. It is very contradictory to the whole character of God, as revealed in the word of his grace,

that you should go through seas of trouble, have wave after wave and billow after billow of affliction, go into trial after trial and temptation after temptation, and then, like Solomon's fool, who is "brayed in a mortar among wheat with a pestle," come out as you went in, your foolishness not departed from you—it may be with a broken head and a bruised body, but not a broken heart or a contrite spirit. God chastises his people to make them partakers of his holiness. He does not send afflictions, trials, and chastisements upon them to do nothing for them or in them beyond a few sighs and groans. If, then, the various trials that you speak so much about, the heavy afflictions that you seem so exercised with, and the temptations which so often press you sore, leave you just as they found you, with no sanctifying, no humbling, no softening, or subduing effect upon your spirit, it seems almost as if you were in the mortar with the fool; and that all the pounding with the pestle, and all the bruising in body or mind, in family or in circumstances, in pride or pocket, in self or in your second self, only left you just where it found you, no nearer the kingdom of heaven, no more conformed in your spirit to the image of Christ, no more separate from the world and the spirit of it, and made no more manifestly meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

II.—But having thus far traced out the character spoken of in our text as bearing stamped upon him, by the hand of God, the four distinctive marks which I have described, I shall now show who is "*the Branch of the Lord*" that is "beautiful and glorious," and what is the "*fruit of the earth*" which is "excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel."

i. By "the Branch of the Lord" we must understand our Lord Jesus Christ; for this is the word which the Holy Ghost has expressly made use of to indicate him: "And there shall come

forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." (Isa. 11:1.) "Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH. He shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord." (Zech. 6:12.) "Behold I will bring forth my servant, THE BRANCH." (Zech. 3:8.) By the word Branch, then, as thus applied to our Lord, we may primarily understand the human nature of Christ; for the Branch was to come out of the stem of Jesse, and our Lord "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." (Rom. 1:3.) But if we look at a remarkable passage in Jeremiah, we shall see that this title, the Branch of the Lord, comprehends both his divine and human nature; for these really never can be separated. The humanity of Christ never existed separate from his deity; for it was united to his Divine nature in the moment of conception. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch;" and then it goes on, "This is his name whereby he shall be called, the LORD our righteousness." Thus we have the Divine nature, as intimated by the word "the LORD," that is Jehovah, and the humanity as indicated by the expression "our righteousness." Thus we may take "the Branch of the Lord" to signify our blessed Lord in his complex Person as God and man in one glorious Christ.

This Branch of the Lord is "beautiful and glorious to them that are escaped of Israel." But what makes him "beautiful?" His being so suitable. I have shown you from the text that those to whom the Branch of the Lord is beautiful and glorious are the escaped of Israel; and I have pointed out that they are such as have known something of the anger of God in a broken law, the condemnation of a guilty conscience, the taunting accusations of Satan, and their need of a better righteousness than flesh can work out. As, then, the Branch of the Lord, the Son of God and the Son of man, in his complex Person, is brought before them, revealed in

them, and discovered unto them, in his Deity, in his humanity, in the efficacy of his atoning blood, and in the glory of his justifying righteousness, he becomes "beautiful" to them. They see a beauty in the Son of God altogether inexpressible. Where in heaven or on earth can there be found such a lovely Object as the Son of God? View him in his divine Sonship and eternal Deity—what beauty there is in him as thus revealed to faith. How beautiful to see all the wisdom of God, which we stand so deeply in need of to guide and direct our path; all the love of God, for God is love, to attract, charm, and bless; all the mercy of God, so suitable to poor lost sinners; all the grace of God, that saves without worth or worthiness; all the pity and compassion of God, that moved him to think upon, to pardon, and to bless poor guilty man;—to see all this glory of God shining forth in the face and Person of Jesus Christ, brought nigh to us in Immanuel, God with us, God in our nature, how beautiful is he as thus revealed and seen. The attributes of the divine nature are thus not viewed at a distance, as dimly and darkly seen in a holy God; not looked upon as the children of Israel looked at Mount Sinai, amidst flames of fire and thunder and lightning, the sound of a trumpet and voice of words; but looked at in the meek and mild majesty of God's dear Son. Thus as we can look at the natural sun when it is shielded by a cloud or descending in its evening radiance, when we cannot bear to view its bright beams in the meridian day; so we can look at God in Christ, and so all the grace and glory, power and wisdom, love and mercy of God shining forth in his dear Son. As such, is he not a beautiful Object for faith to view, hope to anchor in, and love to embrace and enjoy? "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" asked the companions of the Bride. But she answers, "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." If, then, you never have seen any beauty in Jesus, you have never seen Jesus; he has never revealed himself to you; you never had a

glimpse of his lovely face, nor a sense of his presence, nor a word from his lips, nor a touch from his hand. But if you have seen him by the eye of faith, and he has revealed himself to you even in a small measure, you have seen a beauty in him beyond all other beauties, for it is a holy beauty, a divine beauty, the beauty of his heavenly grace, the beauty of his uncreated and eternal glory, such as no earthly countenance can wear, nor man or woman, no, not Adam, in all his unfallen innocence, nor his fair partner Eve, with all her virtue, grace, and dignity, ever could show, for it is the beauty of the glorious Son of God, which he for ever wears as the Son of the Father in truth and love.

ii. And as he is "beautiful," so is he "*glorious*." O what a glory does faith see sometimes in his eternal Deity, in his divine Sonship, in what he is in himself as the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his Person, and in what he is as made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. How glorious does he show himself to be in his atoning blood and dying love. Even as sweating great drops of blood in Gethsemane's gloomy garden, and as hanging in torture and agony upon Calvary's cross, faith can see a beauty in the glorious Redeemer, even in the lowest depths of ignominy and shame. Was there not a glory in his meek obedience, in his suffering patience, in his submission to his Father's holy will, in his uncomplaining resignation to the heaviest strokes of vindictive justice, in bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and thus putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself? But more especially does faith see him glorious, as rising from the dead and going up on high, and sitting down at the right hand of the Father, crowned with glory and honour, and all things put under his feet.

iii. But "the fruit of the earth," it is added, "shall be excellent

and comely for them that are the escaped of Israel." By the "*fruit of the earth*" we may understand that gracious and holy fruit which grew upon the Branch: and it seems to be called "the fruit of the earth," because it appeared on earth when our Lord was there. Thus not only all his words, works, and ways, all the parables, doctrines, precepts, and promises uttered by the mouth of the Son of God in the days of his flesh, but all the benefits and blessings that spring in the way of redemption out of his complex Person, and grow as it were, a holy fruit out of him as the Branch, such as his atoning blood, his glorious righteousness, his dying love, his resurrection and ascension, and his power to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, may all be considered as "the fruit of the earth," because wrought by him in and upon the earth, and done in the days of his flesh when his gracious feet were upon this earthly ball.

This fruit is "excellent" to the escaped of Israel. There is seen in it to be a divine excellency. Therefore, there is not a shadow of a fault to be found with it. It is perfect in all its parts; complete to the very centre, and therefore seen to be excellent, as so glorifying to God, and so adapted to every want and woe of those that are left in Zion and remain in Jerusalem.

And "comely" too. In his sufferings, in his bloodshedding, obedience, holy life, and expiatory death, there is a surpassing comeliness, because in them shine forth a divine glory and a heavenly beauty. It is indeed the same word as is translated "beauty" in the holy garments made for Aaron by Moses (Exod. 28:2), and clothed in which he ministered before the Lord when he went into the holy place. So our great High Priest now ministers within the veil in the holiness and beauty of his glorified humanity; and as this is seen and apprehended by faith, the Church sings, "I sat under his

shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." "His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him." (Song 2:3; Psa. 21:5.)

May I not appeal to your conscience if these heavenly blessings have not a sanctifying effect and influence on the heart? Such at least is the mind of God in making them known to the escaped of Israel; and does he not make the Branch of the Lord beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth excellent and comely to those that are left in Zion and remain in Jerusalem, that they may be a holy people, and thus manifest by their godly life and walk that they are written among the living in Jerusalem, and are thus distinguished from the dead in sin, and the dead in a profession?