

## **The Incorruptible Inheritance, with its Heirs and Legatees**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, May 28, 1865

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3, 4, 5

When a rich man dies, almost as soon as the breath is out of his body, two questions are often asked: "What did he die worth?" "Whom has he left his money to?" Few care about his body; fewer care about his soul; but a good many care about his money. Even the weeping widow and the mourning sons and daughters, before the corpse of the husband and father is lodged in the ground, will indulge their minds, if not relieve their grief, by some anxious thoughts or inward speculations as to the amount of property left, and what will be the share of each. Nor should we altogether condemn them as showing thereby want of affection for the deceased, or of right and proper feeling under such a painful bereavement. It may colour the whole of their future life, whether the departed died in poverty or affluence, and if possessed of any large amount of property, what the share of each individual may be. But the mystery is soon unravelled. The day of interment comes. The cemetery provides for the body; a charitable hope provides for the soul; and the last will and testament provides for the property. When the interment is over, the family and friends assemble. Were we there and could read hearts, what

emotions we should see agitating well nigh every bosom, as the will was slowly read by the family lawyer. How some would be elated and others depressed, for money, like the fabled magician's wand, can both raise spirits and lay them. And yet disappointment might weigh upon every heart, and a cloud rest upon every face. The eldest son who takes the estates might murmur at finding them so heavily burdened to make a provision for his sisters; the widow at having so small a jointure; and the younger branches that the property was not equally divided amongst all the children. Thus those who got much might think they might have got more; those who got little might complain how hardly they were dealt with; and those, such as distant relatives and second cousins, who got nothing, would with difficulty suppress their vexation and disappointment that their names were not even mentioned in the will, or the small bequest left them of a mourning ring. Let a few years roll on; let us watch the issue; and then it might be found that what had been carefully accumulated was carelessly squandered; that the estates had become heavily mortgaged, the daughters' money lost by profligate or speculating husbands, and the younger sons, having spent all their property, had emigrated with the last few pounds to Australia. Thus that Scripture might be verified with this rich man's money and possessions, "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed." (Prov. 20:21.) It might therefore be found that honest industry, integrity, and ability given by God might be a better property, and possess more abiding substance than land and houses, stocks and shares, aye, than thousands of pounds given by man.

But why do I speak thus? Why do I drop any remarks of this kind upon such a subject as lands and houses, or any such worldly topic as an earthly inheritance? That I may direct your thoughts and draw your attention to an inheritance of a

far different character—to an inheritance which cannot be accumulated by man, whether by bad means or good; which can not be left by will, nor mortgaged for half its worth, nor spent and squandered by an elder son, nor presenting to the world after the lapse of a few years the miserable spectacle of a whole family broken to pieces by extravagant habits or ruinous speculations. It is the inheritance spoken of in our text, which is declared to be "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in heaven," and therefore out of the reach of earthly hearts and human fingers, for a people who are described as "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

Without further introduction, then, I shall this morning endeavour to direct your thoughts and to draw your attention to three points connected with my text.

I.—*First, the inheritance itself, comprising both its character and its security: its character as "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" its security, as "reserved in heaven."*

II.—*Secondly, the heirs and legatees to this incorruptible inheritance: those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."*

III.—*Thirdly, the earnest and foretastes of this incorruptible inheritance, as set forth in the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."*

I.—It is observable how the apostle immediately after the usual salutation to the saints, here designated as "strangers,

elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," begins with blessing and praising God, and how he blesses him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would have you notice two things here. 1. First, what touched the secret string of praise in the apostle's heart? That very truth which has called forth so many discordant cries, so many almost shouts of horror from all quarters—that God has a people "elect, according to his own foreknowledge," whom he sanctifies by the Spirit "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Instead of denouncing the doctrine of election as "horrid" and the people who believed it and knew their interest in it as "narrow-minded bigots, wild fanatics, or mad enthusiasts," he prays for them that "grace and peace might be multiplied," or granted them in larger and richer abundance; and instead of being angry with God for electing a people, or declaring, as so many teachers and preachers have done, that such a God was worse than Moloch, he falls to blessing and praising his holy name for the manifestation of such mercy and grace to a chosen people. 2. But observe, secondly, under what title he blessed him: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" In fact he cannot be blessed by us under any other relationship. It is because, and only because, he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that he is to be blessed and praised by us with every faculty of our soul. And why? Because as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ he has blessed us, already blessed us, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Is not this Paul's testimony? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3.) And is not this in connection also with election? "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:4.) How well do Peter and Paul agree in this matter. How consistent their views: how harmonious their

words. Having, therefore, blessed us with all spiritual blessings, he is worthy of all the blessing and praise that we can bestow upon his holy name.

But let us seek for a few moments to open and enter into the meaning of that peculiar title which God claims and bears under the New Testament. As under the old covenant he was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," so under the new he is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Both of them are covenant titles, for as in the old dispensation he made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so in the new he has made a covenant with his dear Son. But how is he "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ?" He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ primarily and essentially as his own proper and eternal Father. Jesus Christ is God's own Son, his true and proper and peculiar Son, "the Son of the Father in truth and love." His Sonship is the grand foundation of the covenant, as it is of all redemption and salvation. When then God "sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin," that is, as a sacrifice for sin, he was not less his Son in his humiliation than he was before his incarnation; and though by taking the flesh and blood of the children he became the Son of man he did not remain the less the Son of God. As the Son of God he came, as the Son of God he suffered, as the Son of God he died; for though Deity did not and could not suffer or die, *he* suffered and died who as the Son of God was God. As our Lord, though he has two natures has but one Person, so though he was the Son of man he is not two Sons but one Son—the lower title coalescing in the higher. Therefore in his complex Person as God-Man he is still the Son of God, and God is still his Father, for he could as soon cease to be God as to be the Son of God. But why is he called "our Lord?" In the covenant of grace he is "our Lord," first, as having bought us with a price, thus establishing a right and claim to us as being purchased

by his blood: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20); and, secondly, he is "our Lord," as being our Head and Husband: "And gave him to be the head over all thing to the church." (Eph. 1:22.) "Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name." (Isai. 54:5.) This counsel, therefore, was given to the church: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." (Psa. 45:10, 11.) "My lord" was the title given by godly women of old to their husbands. Sarah, therefore, said of Abraham: "My lord being old also," to which Peter refers: "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." (Gen. 18:12; 1 Pet. 3:6.) The title therefore which Jesus bears in the mouths of his people in the New Testament is ever "the Lord," or "our Lord." Thomas, when faith sprang up in his heart, called him "My Lord, and my God." (John 20:28.) When, then, God is called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," it implies two things; first, that he is his "Father" in eternal relationship, and, secondly, his "God," as having chosen, sent, and sustained him, and raised him again from the dead, and set him at his own right hand to be a Mediator between himself and us. Thus God the Father is "the Father of Christ," and "the God of Christ"—his Father prior to, irrespective of, and yet now connected with his Mediation; and "his God," as being our Mediator. By this he becomes our Father and God also, our Father by adoption, our God by covenant. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God." (John 20:17.)

But I would have you observe also how fixed and firm these men of God, these prophets and apostles of old, were in the solemn realities and heavenly truths which they proclaim unto us. There was no uncertainty in their mind as to the inheritance or its nature. No dubious, hesitating language

ever fell from their lips. They spoke what they knew; they declare to us what had been revealed to them. And they knew also not only what the inheritance was in itself, but their own abiding interest in it. Peter therefore speaks of himself as "an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." (1 Pet. 5:1.) Only, therefore, so far as we are possessed of a measure of the same faith which was in them, can we stand upon the same spot, bless the same God, and feel a gracious, experimental persuasion of our interest in the same spiritual blessings.

i. But now let me come to the two points which I proposed to bring before you; first, the *inheritance*, with those characteristic marks which so distinguish it from every earthly portion. These mark its peculiar nature. Let me, however, before I enter upon any description of its nature by opening what the apostle has here laid down as peculiar marks of this inheritance, tell you what the inheritance is in itself. If a man leave an estate by will, it is usually a well marked, clearly defined property, having its title deeds, its boundaries, its distinguishing features to determine what it is, and where situated. So when God has given and appropriated an inheritance for the possession and eternal enjoyment of his people, he has not left us in any measure of uncertainty as to what that inheritance is. What then is it? Let us look at and examine it, that we may see each for ourselves whether it is ours. This inheritance, then, is *himself*. This was beautifully typified in the case of the Levites. God gave them no inheritance among their brethren. We find him, therefore, thus speaking to Aaron: "Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel." (Num. 18:20.) Now Aaron and his descendants, as ministering in the sanctuary and alone

possessing the priesthood and the service of the tabernacle, typified the people of God, and this under two relationships. First, the Levites were taken in the place of the first-born. When God in Egypt passed over the first-born males of the house of Israel, he claimed the first-born whether of man or beast as his, as we find him speaking: "And I behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the first-born that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; because all the first-born are mine; for on the day that I smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the Lord." (Num. 3:12, 13.) Now, as thus passed over, all the first-born had to be redeemed whether of man or beast: "All the first-born of thy sons thou shalt redeem" (Exodus 34:20); and the redemption price was fixed for man at five shekels: "And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thy estimation, for the money of five shekels." (Num. 18:16.) When, therefore, the people were numbered, the first-born were numbered also, and amounted to twenty and two thousand two hundred and three score and thirteen. Now it happened that when the Levites were numbered also, all the males from a month old and upward were just twenty-two thousand. As, then, there was a number of the first-born beyond the number of the Levites, amounting to "two hundred and three score and thirteen," redemption money to that amount was required to be paid for them, in order that the Levites might exactly occupy man by man the place of the first-born. I mention this singular circumstance to show you what I may call God's accuracy in redemption, and that it is not a general and universal but a special and particular act, and the place in consequence which the Levites took as representing both the first-born and the redeemed. They thus stood before God and man as representing "the general



assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven." (Heb. 12:23.) But, secondly, as the people of God are "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," the tribe of Levi, to which was confined the office of priesthood, typically represented the people of God under their character as priests. The four living creatures, therefore, in the Revelation sang, as a part of their new song, "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests." (Rev. 5:10.)

God, therefore, spiritually, as in the case of the Levites typically, is the inheritance of his people—God in his Trinity of Persons and Unity of Essence: God in all his eternal, gracious, and glorious attributes. Whatever the great I AM is in himself, the perfection of blessedness, he is that as the inheritance of his saints. We therefore read of them that they are heirs of God. (Rom. 8:17.) And what an inheritance!—not so much heaven as he who dwelleth in the highest heavens!

But there are two particular attributes of God which form what I may perhaps call the chief and enduring substance of this inheritance. These are his *love* and his *holiness*. There are attributes of God specially adapted to a time-state, which, so to speak, will not be needed in the state to come. His long-suffering, his forbearance, his mercy, his tender pity, his guiding eye, his delivering hand, his providential care—these attributes of Jehovah are needed for a time-state, but will not be needed when all the saints will see Jesus as he is. But love and holiness, or rather God in his love and in his holiness, will ever be the inheritance of his saints. His name, his nature is love, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8); and holiness is so peculiarly his that he is emphatically called the "Holy one of Israel." The song at the Red Sea was, "Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?" (Exod. 15:11.) And what was the seraphim's cry in the temple one to another

but "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts?" (Isai. 6:3.) These two essential attributes of God are the blessedness of heaven, and will be the bliss of the saints in glory. His love will ever flow forth as rivers of pleasure into their happy, glorified spirits through the humanity of Jesus, and his holiness will ever be reflected upon them and delighted in by them, for they will be made perfect in holiness, both in body and soul. Thus will they ever bask in his love, and swim in the sea of his holiness; holiness and love being the eternal happiness of heaven, as sin and enmity will be the eternal misery of hell. I shall show you by and by what bearing this has upon the experience of God's saints upon earth; but just take at present this from my lips, that God is the inheritance of his saints, and especially in his two attributes of holiness and love.

ii. But we now come to the *distinctive marks* of this inheritance. It is spoken of in our text as "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." We will look at these three distinctive marks separately.

1. *First*, it is *incorruptible*. Earthly inheritances are essentially corruptible; and they are corruptible in three points of view. Many large inheritances have had their foundations laid in corruption. Immense fortunes in this metropolis have been gained by grinding the faces of the poor. Many a poor stitch girl has been sacrificed to the demon of fashion. Some of these victims of overwork, underfood, and crowded rooms have died in their sleeping dens; others have gone home to die of consumption in their widowed mothers' arms; and all to swell the purses of men milliners and women milliners, who so profusely and so expensively supply "the changeable suits of apparel, the mantles, the wimples, and the crimping pins" of the fashionable ladies of the day. Nor have the victims of cheapness been less numerous than the victims of

fashion; for money can be coined out of blood and bone as much at the East end where ragged stitch-women make slop-shirts for the poor, as at the West where well dressed stitch-ladies make court dresses for the rich. But this is only one instance of misery and corruption. Oppression, exaction, and covetousness, fraud, gambling, and speculation have heaped up many a splendid fortune. And that surely must needs be a corruptible inheritance which is gained by corruption. How often do we see money thus badly gained as badly spent, and the curse of the Lord in the house of the wicked? Earthly inheritances are therefore, secondly, corruptible, inasmuch as they may soon disappear by fraud or force, by profligacy or robbery, or vanish away as a dream in the night. Lock up your gold and silver in your strong box, deposit your notes, your securities, your bonds in your iron safe. A telegram may come before you rise in the morning to inform you that whilst you were locked up in sleep some burglars have broken your iron safe, or that a fire has taken place on your premises, which melted your gold and silver into a shapeless mass, and burnt your notes and securities to tinder. Is not that essentially corruptible which rust and moth may corrupt, and where thieves can break through and steal? Take it in a third sense: do not riches often minister to corruption? They are not evil in themselves. We often hear ignorant men wrongly quote a Scripture text. According to their version, "money is the root of all evil." Not so: Scripture never spoke so foolishly. Money means house and clothing, food and fuel, the home and education of our children, and necessary provision for the wants of life. Scripture never spoke so foolishly as to say that money which supplies our daily necessities is the root of all evil. What the Scripture says is, "The *love* of money is the root of all evil;" not the money itself, but the love of it. And how true is this. We see from daily experience that where men are not restrained by parsimony or by the fear of God, money ministers to their

corruption. They will have their lusts gratified; and as money affords the means of this gratification, the more money they have the more corrupt does it make them. You may have inherited property legitimately, and yet lose it as Job lost his by the providence of God. In that sense, therefore, your inheritance is corruptible. Your right hand neighbour may have gained his by corruption, and that is corruptible in origin; and your left hand neighbour be squandering his in sin, and that is corruptible in its end. You may have gained yours honestly by industry or bequest, and yet it may be corruptible in result as taken from you by the providence of God.

But not so with the inheritance above: *that* is essentially incorruptible: for it is God himself, as seen, known, and enjoyed in his dear Son. He gives even here below some taste of its incorruptible nature, as admitting of no loss or diminution in itself from outward violence or natural decay; and as received into a believing heart allowing of no abuse to ungodly purposes; for the more we know of what that inheritance is in anticipation by the sweet foretastes of it, the more it will lead to godliness and holiness. No burglars can break into that blissful abode; no fire can consume that heavenly treasure. It cannot decay with age, like a house; or become barren, like a worn out field; be mortgaged like an estate, or lost from spending it too freely; for these earthly contingencies can never touch the inheritance of the sanctified. Nay, more, we must die fully to enter into possession of it; for our corrupt bodies could not bear the exceeding and eternal weight of glory to be enjoyed when put into full possession of the incorruptible inheritance.

2. But it is also "*undefiled*." Earthly inheritances are often defiled. Even if clean in themselves we may defile them. Dirty fingers may defile the cleanest object. I should not like

for a chimney sweep to have handed to me my cravat this morning, or to have laid his black hands upon the bosom of my shirt, if I had met him in the street. So it is not the thing itself which is naturally or necessarily defiled; it is touching it with dirty fingers that defiles it. You might go to the bank tomorrow, and receive your April dividend in sovereigns fresh from the Mint, or in bank notes all crisp and new. But suppose before you got home you were to spend one of your bright sovereigns in gluttony and drunkenness; or bought some expensive jewellery for your wife with your bank notes when you were in debt to your butcher and baker: would not that drunkenness or extravagance stain the brightest sovereign, and defile the cleanest, crispest notes ever issued by the Bank of England? It is then our dirty fingers that defile what in itself may be clean. There is no sin in inheriting land, houses, money, left to you by your father's will. To the pure all things are pure. The Lord said, "Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you." (Luke 11:41.) Nay, the Apostle speaks to the rich, charging them to be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (1 Tim. 6:18, 19.) People often speak against money, especially other people's money, as if it were something inherently bad. Money must be in itself the same whether it be little or much, yours or theirs. I dare say if you have none of your own you are very glad to have some of other people's—eagerly accepting *from* them what you condemn *in* them. It is not the use, then, it is the abuse which is to be condemned. The money is not defiled in itself; for it often comes to us in such a way of providence that we are compelled to see the hand of God expressly giving it. It is therefore only when we abuse God's good gift that we defile it. But we cannot defile the inheritance of which Peter speaks. That is out of the reach of dirty fingers, whether our

own or others. Nay, it is in itself so pure and holy that the very foretastes of it in the soul cannot be really defiled by any base imaginations of our vile heart, or by the corruptions of our depraved nature, though they are surrounded by them. Our blessed Lord, who is gone up to the right hand of the Father, and there sits enthroned in glory, ever was and ever is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Even now to see him by the eye of faith conforms the soul to his image, as the apostle beautifully expresses it: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The purity and holiness of Christ, as made known to the soul, make him "the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." And O what a wonder that he should even say to his church when he knocks at the door of her heart, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." (Song. 5:2.) Undefiled, therefore, not only is the inheritance, but as washed in his blood, undefiled are the heirs.

3. "And which *fadeth not away.*" All earthly things fade, either in themselves or in their enjoyment. You may think what a happy man you would be if somebody would leave you a handsome legacy, or if you came into sudden possession of a large sum of money. I saw the other day the suicide of a well-known London banker, who was worth at least a quarter of a million of money, according to the probate of his will. It is not for me to make any comment upon the sad circumstance, but I will just tell you what occurred to my mind when I saw the account. The thought struck me in a moment, what a poor thing money must be when the possession of a quarter of a million could not keep its owner from suicide. How little happiness must he have had from all his property thus to throw it, and body and soul with it, away. Now you might think a very small part of that

large amount would make you happy; and yet you might have so much bodily or mental misery accompanying the very gift, that your present tried circumstances would be almost a paradise in comparison. A cancer in your mouth, a paralytic stroke, a dying wife or husband, or what would be more intolerable, the sense of God's wrath in your soul, would be a heavy counterpoise to all the money. Or even without this ballast, your anticipated happiness would prove a shadow and not a substance. The enjoyment of it would fade away like a gathered flower, or like a butterfly caught by a child in the fields: all its bloom would fade away, and its painted wings be crushed as soon as it was caught. And should it not fade away in reality, it would fade away in the very act of enjoyment. Your cherished prospects, your fostered schemes, and all the airy dreams in which you have revelled, by which you have created sometimes, in imagination, an earthly paradise should you succeed in gaining them all, you would find that you had embraced a cloud or grasped a shadow. Perhaps you have obtained what was once the utmost height of your ambition. Were you satisfied? Was there not disappointment attending it which you had never expected, which marred all your expected happiness in it? If the cup was sweet as it touched your lips, was there not a bitter, bitter drop at the bottom which marred all the sweetness, and turned the whole draught into gall and wormwood? But the inheritance reserved in heaven for the saints is incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away. Even on earth it does not fade, for it is ever fresh, ever blooming, ever new. There is in it a sweetness which never cloy, a satisfaction which leaves behind no bitter reflections. The sweetest and best of earthly blessings perish in the using, if they do not leave behind a sting of guilt and shame. And if this inheritance fade not on earth how will it be in heaven? There will be there no fading flowers, no withered prospects, no disappointed dreams; but ever new and

renewed pleasures; for "he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 21:5.) Nay, "the Lamb himself which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters"—ever fresh, ever flowing, and therefore ever new.

iii. And now a word on the *security* of this inheritance. It is "*reserved* in heaven." The word "reserved" here means preserved, or kept secure. Thus the inheritance is made sure to the heirs—secured to them by an everlasting covenant, and kept safely for them until they are put into possession of it. As they are waiting for the inheritance, so the inheritance is waiting for them. But it is reserved for them "in heaven," and they must go there to possess and enjoy it. The sealing of the Spirit gives the earnest here; but the full possession will come hereafter.

II.—And this leads us to our next point, which was to consider the *heirs and legatees* of this heavenly inheritance. This is a very important matter. If you were present at the reading of the will of which I spoke in the beginning of my discourse, the most anxious moment with you would be to hear whether your name was in it, and if so, what was the amount of money left you. I have described the inheritance. I have spoken a little of its nature, and security. I am now going to read the will, and recite aloud the names of the heirs and legatees. Listen whether I read out your name as put down in this last will and testament of the divine Testator. But mark this; if you can find your character in it, it will be the same thing as if I read aloud your name. There are, I may say, two copies of the will, one in heaven, called the Book of Life: that contains the *names*. The other copy is on earth, called the Word of Truth: that contains the *characters*. The one, so to speak, is God's private will; the other God's public will; and the names in the one correspond



with the characters in the other. Listen, then, to the character of the heirs and legatees as given in our text: "Reserved in heaven for *you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*"

i. There is a people, then, who are "kept by the power of God:" and kept by him for a particular purpose and end. These are the heirs and legatees of the great Testator, for the inheritance, as I have shown, is reserved for them; in other words, as they are kept for the inheritance, so the inheritance is kept for them. The expression in the original is very striking. The word rendered "kept" signifies kept as in a garrison. It might, therefore, be rendered "garrisoned" by the power of God. The word is well worth examination, for there is much divine truth couched in it. How then are they thus garrisoned?

1. They were garrisoned, in the first place, in the mind of God from all eternity; for they were chosen *in* Christ before the foundation of the world, and given to the Son of God that they might be preserved in him. Does not Jude thus speak? "Sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called" (Jude 1), evidently referring their preservation in Jesus Christ to a period prior to their calling. Thus they were, if I may use the expression, stored up and safely laid in the bosom of Christ, united to his Person as the bride to the Bridegroom, made his spouse, inheritance, property, and possession by divine decree. Thus as the inheritance was appointed for them, so were they appointed for the inheritance; both the inheritance and the heirs being absolutely fixed, the one as much so as the other in the purpose and by the decree of God. They are as sure therefore eventually of enjoying the inheritance as the inheritance is reserved for them by the will and power of God. And thus being preserved in Jesus Christ before they

are called by grace and manifested as heirs, they are kept by the power of God from perishing in their unregeneracy. Have not you been almost miraculously preserved in the midst of dangers, and escaped when others perished by your side, or been raised up as it were from the very brink of destruction and the very borders of the grave? Besides some striking escapes from what are called accidents, three times in my life, once in infancy, once in boyhood, and once in manhood, I have been raised up from the borders of the grave, when almost every one who surrounded my bed thought I should not survive the violence of the attack. Were not these instances of being kept by the power of God? I could not die until God had manifested his purposes of electing grace and mercy to my soul. And so now, I am immortal till my work is done. Some, if not many, who saw me last year might have thought I should not live to see this. But though I look and am weak and feeble from having had at various times much bodily affliction, I shall live as long as God purposes; and if he has a work for me to do in his church, I shall live until I have done it, as kept by the power of God so long as he may have need of me.

2. But they are kept also by the mighty power of God after they are called by grace; for they are in the hollow of his hand, and are kept as the apple of his eye. I will not say are kept from all sin, for were I so to speak, the cases of David and Peter would stare me in the face; yet I will say this, they are kept from damning sins. They are kept I may add especially from three things; from the dominion of sin, from daring presumption, and damnable error. I do not say that they are not tempted to these things; but temptation is one thing and transgression is another; neither is all presumption damning, nor all error damnable. It is from daring and final presumption, from lasting and damnable error that God keeps as in a garrison all the heirs and legatees of his

inheritance. They are never suffered to embark on the wide sea of error, and there wander and get lost, or concerning faith to make awful shipwreck; they are never drowned in the sins and evils of the present life so as to be swallowed up in them, for they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; and if so, it is impossible that they can ever be lost.

ii. But observe *how* they are kept. They are not kept mechanically; they are not preserved as persons are preserved from falling over a bridge by a rail, or as children are kept from tumbling into the fire by a tall iron fender. They are not kept mechanically, though often providentially, but spiritually—kept *through faith*. God gives them faith; that faith he draws out; through that faith Christ reveals himself, makes himself precious, dwells in their heart, conveys his promises, his presence, his precepts, and everything connected with his Person and work. Thus, as through faith they embrace Christ, lean upon Christ, and receive out of Christ's fulness, which faith is not a dead, motionless, inert notion, but a vital active principle, as being a grace of the Spirit, they are kept by the mysterious, invisible power of God through faith in his dear Son. So that though they are kept absolutely by the power of God, they are so kept by his power through faith that they are kept spiritually and experimentally; not visibly but invisibly, not forcibly and against the strugglings of love and liberty, but in harmony with both; not against their will and inclination, but with their will and inclination; not against their solemn, deliberate approval of what is right, but with the full consent of an enlightened mind and a believing heart.

And do observe how the power of God by which they are kept acts in harmony with faith. Thus sometimes it is the power of the *word* upon their heart. "By the word of thy lips I

have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." (Psa. 17:4.) Sometimes it is the power of *godly fear* in their conscience. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." (Nehem. 5:15.) "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9.) "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." (Prov. 16:6.) Sometimes it is by the power of his *love*. "The love of Christ constraineth us." (2 Cor. 5:14.) Sometimes it is by the power of his *promises*. "Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1.) And sometimes it is by the power of his *precepts*. "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way." (Psa. 119:104.) In all these cases the power of God acts through faith, and therefore does no violence to our will; for he says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." (Psa. 32:8.) "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psa. 110:3.)

iii. And they are kept unto *salvation ready to be revealed*. They are therefore preserved in hours of temptation, in seasons of great danger and extremity; for they are guarded by all the power of Omnipotence, shielded by the unceasing care and watchfulness of him who can neither slumber nor sleep. He therefore says, "In that day sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." (Isa. 27:2, 3.) It is said of Israel of old, "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." (Deut. 32:9, 10.) The heirs of God are kept *unto salvation*. Nothing short of this would do. They are never left till they are landed. If you were carrying your wife or child through a stream deep enough to drown them,

or rapid enough to sweep them away, would you leave them half in the river, or carry them right through? They might be lost in the few last yards. If God did not carry us right through Jordan's swelling stream, we should sink when close to the bank.

And this salvation is "*ready to be revealed*"—now in grace to your heart, soon in glory to your soul. It is even now at the door, for Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20); and the time draws on when it shall be revealed from heaven at the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Look back and see whether you can find anything of being thus kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Can you not sometimes see how the hand of God has been with you for many years, how it has held you up and brought you through many a storm, preserved you under powerful temptations to commit sin or suicide, fall into presumption or despair; how kindly yet firmly it restrained you from falling a prey to the destroyer; how gently sometimes it drew you on, sometimes kept you back; how from time to time faith was given you to embrace the Son of God, to receive him as revealed in the word and as made known to your heart; how he inclined your mind to listen to his word, to obey his precepts, to seek to know his will and do it? Do you not see how the fear of God was planted deep in your soul, your conscience made alive and tender, and you kept from evil that it might not grieve you? And now looking back through a long vista of years, you can see the kind hand of God stretched out again and again on your behalf, and can set to your seal that you have been kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Then you are an heir and a

legatee of this incorruptible, undefiled inheritance. You are in the will, and all its provisions and all its possessions are yours. Does not the apostle say, "All things are yours?" And why? Because "Ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) In this will all share alike, and yet each has all. In this last will and testament there is no widow cut down to a miserable jointure; no heir cut off with a shilling; no collapse of a once splendid property; no late discovery of mortgaged estates and ruinous liabilities, swallowing up not only the reputed wealth but the good name and fame of the testator. Your inheritance is no such delusion and deception, but a solid reality and an affluence beyond calculation, for it is God himself in all his divine and glorious perfections.

But I have not yet done with the heirs and legatees. I have something more to speak to and of them. I have to draw their character over again; to point out their names more clearly still as inscribed in the last will and testament of the heavenly Testator. And this I now unfold, according to my third division, which is,

III.—*The earnest and foretastes* of this heavenly inheritance. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath *begotten us again unto a lively hope* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

This lively hope to which we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the main earnest and foretaste of this glorious inheritance. We find the apostle thus speaking in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." This inheritance is the same as that which Peter speaks of in our text as "incorruptible, and

undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And observe that it is "in Christ" that we have obtained it; for only as in him and one with him have we any share or portion in it. But now see what Paul says about the earnest and foretaste of this inheritance: "In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." There is the earnest: the seal of the Spirit, according to Paul; "the lively hope," according to Peter. There is no want of harmony between the two apostles. It is the same thing unfolded under a different view. A lively hope, or, as the word might be rendered, a living hope, is the gift and work of the Spirit and is the seal of salvation, for "we are saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24); and this living or lively hope being unto eternal life, an inward earnest of immortality unto which we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, it stands in union with faith and love and the sealing witness of the Holy Ghost unto present grace and future glory. There are several points which need to be unfolded here, to cast a clearer light upon the subject.

i. First, the connection of a lively hope with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the grand foundation on which our holy faith rests. I would not use any unbecoming, irreverent expression in speaking of our adorable Saviour, and yet I would say if our most blessed Lord had not risen from the dead he would have been plainly manifested as not being the Son of God, but an impostor. But his resurrection from the dead was the crowning attestation to the truth of his mission. It was God's own seal, not only unto his divine and eternal Sonship, but that he was the Christ of God, the promised Messiah, the child that was to be born, the Son who was to be given. (Isa. 9:6.) He was, therefore, "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead."

(Rom. 1:4.) Our Lord, so to speak, staked the whole truth of his mission upon this fact, whether he should rise from the dead or not. His resurrection from the dead was the grand attesting miracle whereby God himself set to his visible seal that he who lay in the sepulchre was his only begotten Son; that the crucified and buried Jesus was the Son of God whom he had sent to save those that believe. This, therefore, was the grand doctrine which the apostles preached, as we read:—"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." (Acts 4:33.) No one, therefore, could be an apostle who was not a personal witness of his resurrection in having seen him alive after his passion by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3, 22), or by special revelation, as in the case of Paul: "Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1.)

ii. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not only the grand attestation which God set to the truth of his mission, but it involved in itself other consequences, and was the productive parent of other fruits. When he rose from the dead, the Church of God virtually rose with him; for as he is the Head, and the Church the members, when the Head rose from the dead, triumphant over death and hell, the Church mystically and virtually rose together with him, for Head and members could not be separated. The apostle, therefore, speaks of our "being quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:5, 6.) So close and intimate is the union between the Head and members that the resurrection of Christ was virtually the resurrection of the Church, her resurrection from the curse of the law, from her state of condemnation, and from the miserable consequences of the Adam fall. When then our blessed Lord rose from the dead, the Church rose with him out of all the depths of the fall, and



he thus secured for her two inestimable blessings. 1. A certain pledge of her *resurrection* at the great day, that is, the resurrection of all the glorified bodies of the saints, he being the first fruits, as the apostle argues in that glorious chapter 1 Cor. 15. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death by man came also the resurrection of the dead." As surely then as Christ rose will the Church rise; for "as we have borne the image of the earthy we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor. 15:21, 22, 49.) But, 2, secondly, it was also a pledge of *regeneration*, for the Church can only enter into Christ's kingdoms by regeneration. "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." If there is an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and we are to enter into the possession and enjoyment of that glorious inheritance, to be for ever partakers of its bliss and blessedness, we must have a capacity for that enjoyment. I showed you that the two attributes of God which would form the bliss of this inheritance were love and holiness. We then must have love, and we must have holiness, or we can have no knowledge of, no communion with, no delight in, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When, then, the blessed Lord rose from the dead, we not only virtually rose with him, as regards resurrection future, but rose also with him as regards resurrection present: the resurrection of the soul in grace, as well as the resurrection of the body in glory. I have said that it was the pledge of both, but it was something more than a pledge; it was the efficient cause. The apostle speaks of God as "quickening the dead, and calling those things which be not as though they were;" that is, the future is so certain when God has promised it, that it is as if already accomplished. "As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations." "I *have made* thee"—already made thee, not "I *will* make thee;" and this many years before the birth of

Isaac. So God speaks of the church as already risen in Christ; his resurrection being the efficient cause of her regeneration. Now this shows the connection between Christ's resurrection and a lively hope: "Hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." There is then, a begetting again: this is regeneration. This begetting again is "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," and this begetting again by the resurrection as the cause, and regeneration as the effect, is unto a lively or living hope. Why is there a living hope in your bosom, and what is the foundation of that lively hope but the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Could there be any hope in your soul of mercy, pardon, peace, and eventually of a heavenly inheritance, if Jesus had not risen from the dead? Where would have been the blood of atonement; where would have been the robe of righteousness; where would have been the blotting out of all sin, and the acceptance of the persons of the saints before God? All would have been sunk in the tomb of Jesus, and never risen from that tomb unless he had risen out of it. But when he rose from the dead, it was made manifest that atonement had been offered and accepted for transgression, sin blotted out, righteousness brought in, and the Church of God saved with an everlasting salvation. So we see what momentous consequences hang upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that it is not only a proof but a pledge; and not only a pledge but an efficient cause; and not only an efficient cause but a triumphant end and issue.

iii. But carry on your view a little further. I love to make my points clear. Let us have no confusion of thought, and, if we can help it, of expression in these important matters. What does our lively hope spring from? Its foundation is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But the apostle speaks of being "begotten unto this lively hope;" in other

words, he testifies of this lively or living hope as a fruit of quickening, regenerating grace. Having already quickened us together with Christ by and in his resurrection, he begets us with the word of truth, regenerates our souls by a divine influence, breathes into our hearts the breath of life, communicates the life of God, and by the power and influence of the Holy Ghost makes us new creatures in Christ. Now the fruit and effect of this regenerating grace is to create a living or lively hope in our souls. If then you cannot read regeneration in your breast; if you cannot find that the Holy Ghost has ever breathed into you the breath of life, you have no hope, no lively hope. You may have a hope—that kind of charitable hope that I spoke of in the case of the rich man which the relations indulge in, as a kind of soothing cordial, when the poor creature never manifested one mark of vital godliness either in life or death. That is a dead hope; but our text speaks of a living hope. Now if there be a living hope, and that hope is in our breast, it will manifest its life. Does not a mother know the distinction between a still-born babe and a living child? No creeping to the bosom in the still-born child, no laying hold of nature's bland nutriment; all cold and dead, and thrust away as soon as possible into its little coffin. So in grace: where there is a living hope, it will be like the living child in the mother's warm bosom—it will nestle and breathe, and exert all those tender movements that the mother knows and loves so well when she presses her new-born babe to her fond breast. Have you that living babe in your bosom, nestling, clinging, breathing, and manifesting that there is life in it by its inward movements in your soul? This is a living hope and a lively one too. It is the lively child as well as the living; for there may be a living child which is, so to speak, only just living; only just breathing. But a lively child is a step beyond a living child, as having more active movements, more energetic drawings, nestling more strongly in, and cleaving more closely to the

mother's warm embrace. Have you then a lively hope as well as a living, a strong, active, vigorous child pulling at your breast, and not a puny, sickly, half-dying, diminutive cripple, a wizened-face doll, as if born before its time in a London alley? When a servant of God has unfolded the truth spiritually and experimentally, described the work of grace upon the heart, brought forward the various signs and marks that are in a living soul, have you not felt that there was a springing up of a lively hope in your bosom, a waking of the child out of the cradle, a crying for food, the pure milk of the word, and a feeding upon the food given? As the food came warm, bland, and fresh, every member of the new man was strengthened, and the hope was not merely living, but lively too, leaping for joy, like the babe in the womb of Elizabeth. To know and experience this is a fruit of being begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

iv. And this "*according to his abundant mercy.*" O the riches of his abundant mercy! It was mercy that gave us to Christ; it was mercy that preserved us in Christ; it was mercy that called us to Christ; it was mercy that gave us to believe in Christ; it was mercy that enabled us to love Christ. And O how "abundant!" What sinners we have been; what base rebels; what wretched wanderers from the living God! And yet again and again he has begotten a lively hope or renewed it; and all according to the abundance of his mercy. A little mercy would not suit you or me: like a few drops of rain, it would soon be lost in the dust in a dry season like this. What we want is a copious shower that shall go down to the very roots of our soul, and water our faith and hope and love. When this abundant shower falls down from the windows of heaven, how it nurtures every grace; how it waters the soul as with the river of God, and brings forth the lively hope into blessed exercise upon his goodness and mercy.

v. And when so blessed, is not this a becoming word from our lips? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Blessed be his holy name! "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." What a tender relationship! In what a blessed character does he manifest himself unto us as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! How it seems to drop into our heart with such tenderness, and kindles in the bosom such an affectionate response; for because he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, if indeed we believe in his dear Son, he is our God and our Father too. Then we can say, amidst all the din and confusion of hostile tongues, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I have opened the will; I have read some part of its contents, for who can read the whole? and I have pointed out the heirs and legatees. Have I mentioned your name? Have I described your character? Have I pointed out that you are one of the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ? In this heavenly inheritance there is no partiality or favouritism; no vexation and no disappointment; no jealousy and no rivalry. The whole belongs to each, and each has not only a portion but the fulness of the whole; for each has God, who is the whole of the inheritance. Thus each of the heirs and legatees has the inheritance whole and undivided, without jealousy, without favouritism, and without rivalry.

But if you cannot read your name and title in this heavenly inheritance, have you any reasonable ground of hope of eternal life? Is it not fearful to go on for many years making perhaps a profession of religion, and not to have any well-grounded hope in the mercy of God—not to be able in any measure to read your name in the Book of Life? Would that do for an earthly inheritance? How careful men are to make their title good; how careful the testator that every name is

rightly spelled in the will! How anxious the legatee to know that his name is there! Uncertainties will not do in an earthly inheritance; and will they do in an heavenly one?

O to be able to make our calling and election sure; and then we shall be able to lie down each night in peace, as believing we have an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us even should death arrest our breath before morning.