

## **THE SUPERABOUNDINGS OF GRACE OVER THE ABOUNDINGS OF SIN**

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day morning, October 12, 1862

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:20, 21

Wherever we go, wherever we turn our eyes, two objects meet our view—sin and misery. There is not a town nor a village, nor a house, nor a family, no, nor a human heart, in which these two inseparable companions are not to be found;—sin the fountain, misery the stream; sin the cause, misery the effect; sin the parent, misery the offspring.

But some of you may perhaps be inclined to say, "I do not altogether see with you here; I think you take much too gloomy, too melancholy a view of the case. But this is just like you. You are always telling us what sinners we are, and what we feel, or ought to feel, on account of our sins, just as if we were some of the basest, blackest characters in England. I admit there is a great deal of sin in the world; but I do not see so much sin in myself as you represent, nor do I feel so much misery and wretchedness in consequence of it as you are continually talking about." That may be the case, but may it not arise from your want of sight or from your want of feeling? The fact may be the same, though you may not see or feel it. A blind man might be led through the wards of a hospital, and say, amidst all the pain and suffering on well-nigh every bed around him, "I see no disease; where is the disease they speak of? People are always talking about the sickness and suffering in the hospitals; but I don't see

any." Or a person in full health and strength might be struck suddenly down with apoplexy, or fall into an epileptic fit, and be really a most pitiable object, yet himself feel no pain or misery. So your not seeing sin may arise from want of light, and your not feeling it may arise from want of life. You must not, therefore, judge of the non-existence of sin by your not seeing it, or conclude there is no evil in it because you do not feel it. There are those who do see it, there are those who do feel it; and these are the best judges whether such things as sin and misery exist.

But a question may arise, "How came sin and misery into this world? What was the origin of sin?" That is a question I cannot answer. The origin of evil is a problem hidden from the eyes of man, and is probably unfathomable by human intellect. It is sufficient for us to know that sin is; and it is a blessing of blessings, a blessing beyond all value, that we know also there is a cure for it.

Let me give you two illustrations of this. A poor woman has, she fears, a cancer in her breast. She goes to a surgeon and says, "I have a hard lump here, and such sharp, darting pains, just, it seems, as if I had knives driven into me." "O," the doctor says, "my good woman I am afraid indeed that you have a cancer. How did it originate? Had your mother one or any of your family? Have you had a blow there? O," she says, "I cannot tell you: I can only tell you what I have felt and what I feel. Never mind how it came. Here it is, Can you cure it?" Or a young man loses strength and flesh, becomes pallid, is worried with a hacking cough and flying pains by day, and is restless and feverish all night. He goes to a doctor and says, "I am afraid I am ill, my chest feels so bad." "O, my young friend," the doctor replies, after due examination, "I fear there is some disease in your lungs. Was your father or your mother consumptive? Did any of your

brothers or your sisters die of decline? Have you been living in close rooms without air and exercise? How do you think your disease originated? Well, I cannot tell you anything about its origin, or whether I got it from my father or my mother. My chief concern is whether it can be cured."

So you see it is not the origin of a thing, whether bodily disease or moral evil, which we have to look to. We may not be able to tell how evil originated, but, like the poor woman with a cancer, or the consumptive youth, may be able to tell from our feelings that it exists. This, indeed, is the first step in religion, for as the Lord said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." **Mt 9:12,13** When, then, the deep-seated malady of sin is opened up to our view, and we begin to feel that there is no soundness in us, and nothing but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, then arises the anxious inquiry, "Is there a cure?" Now, through God's unspeakable mercy, I can assure you, from His word and in His name, that there is a cure for the malady of sin, and that there is a remedy for the misery and distress which are the sure consequences of it when laid with weight and power upon the conscience. Yes, there is "balm in Gilead—there is a physician there;" there is One who says of Himself, "I am the Lord that healeth thee" **Ex 15:26**; One to whom the soul can say, when the healing balm of a Saviour's blood is made effectually known: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." **Ps 103:2,3**

To unfold the malady and discover the remedy, is the grand purpose of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures of truth; but I do not know any single passage of God's word in which malady and remedy are more powerfully and more closely brought together than in the words of the text. What sin is and what

grace is, are there indeed clearly depicted by the Holy Ghost, written by His unerring pen as with a ray of light. I despair of being able fully or even adequately to open up to your view the depths of truth contained in it, for who can fathom the measureless ocean of abounding sin or lay bare the treasures of superabounding grace? But as the text is one dear to my heart, and one which I wish not to lose sight of for a single day of my life, I shall endeavour, with God's help and blessing, to bring before you something of what I have been led to see and feel in it; and as sin and grace are here so vividly contrasted and brought, as it were, to meet each other face to face, I shall attempt from it to show,

I.—**First**, Sin as **an abounding flood**; Sin as **a despotic tyrant**; Sin as a **cruel executioner**.

II.—**Secondly**, Grace as a **superabounding tide**; Grace as a **reigning monarch**; Grace as a **sovereign giver of eternal life**.

III.—**Thirdly**, how all these inestimable blessings are "**through righteousness**" and "**by Jesus Christ our Lord**."

I.—You will find all that I have stated, and much more, in our text. In fact, language can never utter, as heart can never conceive, the depths of infinite mercy which are stored up in it. It has been a feast for millions. The Lord enable me to spread the table with some of the choice provision revealed in it, and give you an appetite to feed upon it—an appetite well sharpened by a feeling sense of your sin and misery; for it is only those who painfully know the aboundings of sin, and blessedly know the superaboundings of grace, who can sit at this table as hungry guests and hear the Lord's words, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." **So 5:1**

1. I said I would show you sin as **an abounding flood**— "where sin abounded," and I shall take as a figure, to illustrate my meaning, an occurrence which caused a great deal of temporal suffering and distress in an adjoining county, and indeed, from its nature and consequences, produced much apprehension through the country generally. Last Spring, if you recollect, there was a flood in Norfolk, which devastated at least six or seven thousand acres of some of the finest land in England, just at a season when everything seemed to promise fair for abundant crops. I shall use that figure to show you the abounding flood of sin. But I must first explain the circumstances to make my figure more perspicuous, for most of you, probably, are but imperfectly acquainted with them. A low lying tract of land, of many thousand acres, called the Bedford Level, besides a large portion of adjoining country, is artificially drained by the River Ouse, and from its naturally low situation is below the level of the sea at high tide. It is, therefore, necessary that there should be strong, high banks, with flood-gates at the mouth of the river, that it may discharge at low tide the drainage of the surrounding country, and then before the tide again rises that these gates should be closed to keep out the sea. But it so happened, through negligence or some other cause, that a breach was made in this dyke. And what was the consequence? The German ocean, at high tide, entered through this breach, and every successive tide made it deeper and wider, until at last it burst over the whole country, and flooded more than 6 acres of land, the salt water destroying all the crops and carrying consternation and peril through the whole district.

I shall take that figure, therefore, to illustrate my first point— sin viewed as an abounding flood; and, in so doing, I shall consider the German ocean to represent sin; the land smiling

in beauty and verdure the soul of man in its primitive state as created in the image of God; and the dyke that kept out the waters man's innocency in Paradise. Look, then, at sin raging in the bosom of Satan as the German ocean tossed its angry billows in wild confusion upon the Norfolk coast. Wave after wave beat upon the shore; but not one drop could get in so long as the dyke stood. But when a breach was made, though in itself but small, then burst in the German ocean. So as long as man stood in his native purity and uprightness, sin might rage in Satan's boiling breast, but it could not enter into man's bosom. But when temptation came and was listened to, giving heed to the tempter made a gap in the dyke of man's innocency, and then through the breach sin rushed in, as the German ocean into the fair fields of Norfolk. And what was the consequence? It flooded the soul of man; defaced and destroyed the image of God in him, utterly ruined his native innocency, and left upon his conscience a whole mass of ooze and sludge, under which he has ever since lain as a guilty sinner before God. This was not like the flood in Norfolk, to be drained off by pumps and carried back to the ocean whence it came. There was no re-constructing of the dyke, no re-building of the floodgates. When once sin had burst in, no power of man could ever throw it back.

I said in my introduction that the origin of evil was a mystery unfathomable by human intellect. But you will observe that there is a distinction between the **origin** of sin and the **entrance** of sin. The origin of sin is not revealed to us, for it existed in the bosom of Satan before it came into this lower world. But its **entrance** into us we know. The Scripture is clear here. "By one man sin **entered** into the world." And the entrance of death is as plainly revealed as the entrance of sin, for the Holy Ghost adds "and death by sin." Nor are its universal consequences less plainly revealed: "And so death passed upon all men; for that [margin "in whom"] all have

sinned." **Ro 5:12** That sin at once flooded the whole heart of man is evident in the first man that was born of woman. What was he? His brother's murderer. How abounding, how fatal must have been the flood when, out of mere envy and jealousy, one brother should have shed another's blood, as if only just outside the very gates of Paradise!

But in order to gain some insight into the abounding of sin, let us look at it in a variety of particulars, because we must come to dose detail, to practical facts, to experimental feeling, before we can really be made sensible of the truth of God's word in so plainly and positively declaring that sin "**abounded.**"

i. Look at it first, then, as abounding **in the world** at large. Who that has any eye to see or any heart to feel cannot but painfully realise the pressing, the overwhelming fact that sin awfully abounds there? What dreadful murders, what desperate suicides, what acts of violence and robbery, what hideous deeds of uncleanness, what Sabbath breaking, and that systematically encouraged by cheap excursion trains on the great leading railway lines; what neglect of all public and private worship; what contempt of God and man; what daring rebellion against everything holy and sacred; what awful ungodliness and infidelity are displayed to the most superficial view as running down our streets like water, not only in the metropolis, but in all our great towns. These are but waifs and strays thrown upon the shore by the waves of the sea of sin; mere passing specimens which come to light of thousands of unseen, undiscovered crimes. But even where the surface of society is unruffled by these waves of open sin, what a sea of iniquity is buried beneath the still water! What envy, hatred, malice, jealousy, cruelty, and sensuality lie hidden under smiling faces, and what a rooted

dislike to everything spiritual and holy is covered up under an outward form of religion and morality!

ii. When we look at the **professing Church** are things really any better? Does not sin abound there? It is true there is thrown over it a veil which seems to give it a rather more decent appearance: but under that veil, could it be suddenly torn off, what sins we should see to lurk and work. What hypocrisy; what self-righteousness; what hatred of God's truth; what contempt of the saints of God; what pride and worldliness: what giving way to every sensual inclination; what contentment with the mere forms and shadows of religion and setting them up in place of the substance and the power; what ignorance of the true and spiritual meaning of the Scriptures; and what a deadly opposition to the inward life of God and to all who know it, preach it, or profess it!

iii. But come still nearer home. Look at the Church of God; the little flock, gathered out of a sinful world and a deceptive profession. Do we not see sin abounding even there? What strife, division, contention, suspicion, jealousy, hard thoughts and hard words do we see often rending asunder the Church for which Christ died. What little living to the glory of God; what little walking in humility, simplicity, sincerity, godly fear, spirituality of mind, and godly obedience do we see in many who, we hope, after all, are really partakers of distinguishing grace.

iv. But come nearer, closer still. Look to your own bosom; search and examine well the daily working of sin in your own heart. May we not say, I am sure I can for one, sin abounds? We hope that, by the restraining grace of God, sin does not indeed abound in our words or works—the Lord forbid it should! But if it be kept back and restrained there by the fear of God and the power of His grace, does not sin awfully



abound in our thoughts, in our imaginations, in our desires, in the working of our carnal mind? Who that knows himself in the teaching of the Spirit can say that sin has not awfully abounded in him, not only before he was called by grace and made alive unto God by His quickening breath, but since he has known the truth of God in its power? What sins does conscience register against light, against conviction, against our better judgment, against the warnings of God in His word, and, what is still more painful, against mercies, blessings, privileges, and all that the Lord has done for us both in providence and in grace! What miserable unthankfulness; what base ingratitude; what reckless oblivion of all the Lord's mercies; what self-seeking; what pride; what lusting after evil things; what confusion often in prayer; what unbelieving thoughts; what want of fixedness and steadfastness in the ways of God; what lack of self-denial, crucifixion of the flesh, and doing the things which God has commanded, as well as professing them! Surely, when we take a view of what we are as sinners before the eyes of infinite Purity and Holiness, is there one who knows his own heart and is honest before God who must not say, "Sin has abounded in **me?**" It is our mercy if the Lord restrain by His Spirit and grace the outward acts of sin. But there is not a heart that knows its own bitterness which will not confess that sin hath abounded and still abounds in it.

But there are some other ideas connected with the figure of a flood which I do not wish wholly to pass by.

A flood **penetrates**. It does not merely flow over, but penetrates into every place where it comes. So sin has not merely rolled over the human heart with its polluting tide, but has penetrated into every faculty of body and soul. Into every look, every thought, every inclination, every imagination, every passion, and I may well say every

principle of the human mind, has it deeply and thoroughly penetrated so as to defile and pollute them through their whole length and breadth. It has also filled our body with the seeds of sickness and disease, and carried mortality into every thread and fibre of our bodily frame.

But a flood comes down also with **sweeping** force. Such was the flood in Norfolk. Cattle, crops, fences, even houses were swept away by it. So sin, as an abounding flood, has swept away not only man's innocence, but all his strength; and still sweeps away all promises, vows, resolutions, attempts at reformation, and hurls them along in a tide of confusion.

But a flood, also, the **more it is resisted the stronger it is**. So with the flood of sin. It not only sweeps away all the dams and dykes which nature sets up, but is rendered more violent by opposition. This the apostle found: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." **Ro 7:8** He tells us here how sin "took occasion by the commandment:" that is, the very law set up against it only made sin work the more strongly, putting as if fresh life into it; for "without the law sin was dead," that is, was not stirred up into living activity and power.

II. But now let us look at sin under another character, as a **despotic tyrant**. "Sin hath **reigned**." Sin is not a passive thing in man's bosom. It is not contented to lie there as a stone, or even as subject to man's better thoughts. Nothing will satisfy it but the throne, nothing content it but to hold the reigns of government. The very nature of sin is to assert dominion over every faculty of man's body and mind. Nothing less than absolute authority over both will ever content the craving of this restless tyrant: The apostle therefore says "it hath **reigned**." How sin reigns in every

worldly breast! What little check is put upon thoughts or words or works, of whatever kind they be, by natural conscience; or if it speak, what little heed is paid to its voice! Whatever sin bids natural men do, they do it eagerly. Sin leads them captive at its will. They have no will of their own, but obey eagerly, obey submissively, whatever sin commands. Sin has but to issue the word, and they do what it bids. Sin has but to lead, and they follow in the path Where it guides. Sin has but to show itself as king, and all knees bow before it; all hands are active to do its behests, and every foot is obedient to move in the directed path.

Nay, we ourselves, who have, we trust, the fear of God in our bosom, and know something of the Lord Jesus Christ by a living faith, have melancholy evidence that sin "hath reigned," if it do not reign now. What were we in a state of nature? Had not sin then absolute and uncontrolled dominion over us? I don't know that I was worse in my carnal days than other young men of my age or station in life. Indeed, I was in some measure restrained by moral and honourable considerations from being altogether given up to gross abominations, and had a not altogether undeserved character at college for a respect for morality and religion. But if ever I was restrained from sin, it was not from any thought about God. If ever I was kept from positive, absolute evil, it was not because I had any sense in my conscience that there was a God above who watched my actions, and who would one day bring me to His bar. I certainly had no conscience about evil thoughts, or light and foolish words, or a general course of pride and worldly ambition. So I know from my own experience that where the fear of God is not, and the conscience is not made alive and tender, we sin eagerly, we sin greedily, we sin thoughtlessly, so far, at least, as regards any spiritual restraint. If we abstain from sin in outward action, it is from respect to our character, or

from moral constraints, or from fear of man, or want of temptation and opportunity, or from not being entangled with bad companions, or from some apprehension of damaging our worldly prospects. God is not in our thoughts; nor do we abstain from evil either through a desire to please Him or a fear to offend Him. If, therefore, you have not been altogether abandoned to open crime, nor given way to every vile lust of your fallen nature; if your station in life, your sex, the warnings and example of careful parents, the restraints imposed by society upon general conduct, and other moral considerations have preserved you from outward evil, think not that sin has not reigned the less over you. It has reigned in your thoughts, in your inclinations, in your lusts, in your desires, in your pride, in your ambition, in your contempt of God and godliness, in your aspirations after earthly grandeur, your love of dress, fashion, and respectability, in the general neglect and contempt of everything gracious and spiritual, heavenly and holy; in building your hopes below the skies, roaming and revelling in a vain paradise of a gross and sensual imagination.

A man does not know himself who cannot look back through a long vista, sometimes of years, and see how in infancy, in boyhood, in youth, in manhood, up to the very time when grace set up a rival throne in his heart, sin reigned in him. He lived not to God, not for eternity, but for time. He lived not to please God, but to please himself or his fellow creatures. He lived not as one who had a soul to be saved or lost, but as one who had a body to feed and clothe, adorn and gratify, and a mind to please, I will even say, cultivate, but not to devote to the service of God and the good of His people. If this be not the reign of sin, tell me what is. Who is our King but he whom we obey? He is our Lord and master whom we serve; and if we serve him willingly, the stronger master he is. Is not this the apostle's argument, "Know ye

not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" **Ro 6:16** To be the servant of sin, is to acknowledge sin as our king.

But does not sin even now to a great extent reign even in the breasts of those who desire to fear God? It does not, indeed, reign as before, for its power is broken and checked; but still it is ever seeking to regain its further dominion. How suitable then the precept, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" **Ro 6:12**; and how blessed the promise, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." **Ro 6:14**

3. But sin is worse than this: it is a **cruel executioner**; for we read that "sin hath reigned unto **death**."

In one of the paintings in the tombs of Egypt—for they still retain their ancient pictures in all their freshness in that dry climate—there is represented an Egyptian monarch, of almost gigantic stature, supposed to be Sesostris, the Shishak of the Scriptures **1Ki 11:40**, holding in his hand a drawn sabre, and pursuing a crowd of helpless victims, some of whom he is holding by the hair of the head, at the same time wielding the sabre to sever their necks asunder. Now this is just the picture which the Orientals drew of their despotic sovereigns, and much corresponds with a similar representation in the Nineveh sculptures, where a warrior king is represented in his chariot with his bow and arrow aiming at a crowd of wretched fugitives. Such is sin in our text; not merely a despotic monarch, as I have already brought him before your eyes, but himself a cruel executioner, for he reigns "unto death," and never spares a single victim the finishing blow. He is not satisfied with the

life of his subjects; their obedience to his behests, their implicit acquiescence with all his demands: he craves their blood. He snuffs after it as a hungry tiger or famished wolf, for nothing can satisfy him but the death, the cruel death, of all his subjects. For this sanguinary thirst, this unrelenting, murderous disposition and determination, I call him not only a despotic tyrant, but I style him a cruel executioner.

His reigning unto death carries with it a meaning beyond the mere separation of body and soul; for death in Scripture has three distinct meanings—death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal. Unto each and all of these three kinds of death hath sin reigned and reigns still, for the sceptre is not yet struck out of his hand, nor the sword wrenched from his grasp.

i. See him, then, first reigning unto death **temporal**; for "by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that [margin, "**in whom**"] all have sinned." This was the fulfilment of God's word to Adam: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." What a reign is here; what slaughter, what devastation, what universal sway! Sin as universal as death, and death as universal as sin.

ii. But there is another death which is more fatal even than this. When sin entered into man's heart and set up its throne there, it not only brought about the death of the body, but a worse death, even the death of the soul: that alienation from the life of God, that death in trespasses and sins, that moral and spiritual death which the Scriptures speak of, which has paralysed all man's mental faculties Godward, which has utterly ruined the image of God in him, and cast him into a state of enmity and rebellion, misery and helplessness, out of which there could have been no escape but for the

interposition of sovereign grace. I have read of a Spaniard who, when his enemy was in his power, promised he would spare his life if he would blaspheme Christ. The poor wretch obeyed, but no sooner had he spoken the fatal word than the Spaniard thrust his sword into his heart. "Now," he cried, "this is revenge, for I have not only killed his body, but I have killed his soul." So it is with sin; it not only killed man's body, but at the same stroke it killed man's soul.

iii. But there is still another death unto which sin hath reigned, which this cruel executioner inflicts as the last purpose of his wicked mind, the last act of his destructive power,—**the second death**, eternal death, banishment, eternal banishment, from the presence of God, into those gloomy regions, where hope never comes; where there is for ever weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; that abyss of woe, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. View, then, this cruel executioner bringing out his subjects in their long and gloomy files, and inflicting upon them these three kinds of death: death temporal, death spiritual, death eternal.

But what are we? What are we? Merely hearers of these said things? Merely spectators of the execution, witnessing it as if it were a summer holiday? No; we are all bound and chained together in the gloomy file, awaiting, as it were, our time and turn; for as sin hath reigned as our tyrant, so it is or will be our executioner. There is not a person here present within the reach of my voice in whom sin has not, in purpose, done all these three things. The sentence is passed; you are but awaiting its execution. You are all doomed to die; sin will execute upon you the death of your body; it has already brought about the death of your soul; and it will, but for sovereign mercy, bring about the death of body and soul in

hell, where the impenitent and the unbelieving will for ever lie under the terrible wrath of the Almighty.

These things, however painfully they may strike our mind or chill our blood, we have to see and feel each one for himself; and this is the reason why I so strongly insist upon them, for I am well persuaded that no one will ever know or truly and really value the deliverance which God has provided from them, until he has seen and felt, and is deeply and inwardly persuaded of their reality. But I shall not leave you in this miserable case. God has not left you there, nor should I, standing up in His name, act consistently with my position or profession as His servant if I were to leave you there either. I shall therefore pass on to our second point, which is,

II. To bring before you grace as countervailing sin in three respective points. We will now, then, view grace as **a superabounding tide;** grace as a most **benign and clement sovereign;** and grace **as the sovereign disposer and giver of eternal life.**

It is in these glorious triumphs of sovereign grace that the main blessedness of the Gospel consists. Grace meets and vanquishes sin at every point. Is sin a dark, filthy polluting flood? Has it burst through the dyke of man's primitive innocency, utterly defaced the image of God in him, penetrated into every thread and fibre of body and soul, and abounded even to overflowing in every thought, word, and act of heart, lip, and life? Grace shall meet this abounding flood and superabound over it. Does sin reign with despotic sway over the elect of God, subjecting them to his sceptre and lording it over them with iron hand? Grace shall descend from heaven in the Person of the Son of God, shall wrest the sceptre from his grasp, and reign in his stead. Does sin, as a cruel executioner, deal against his hapless victims death and



damnation with every blow? Grace shall beat the sword out of his hand and breathe life into his slaughtered victims—a life which shall never die. These points we have now to consider.

1. First, then, view grace as a **superabounding** tide. The Lord does not take the same means of clearing away the flood of sin as human skill devised and human hands achieved in the case of the Norfolk inundation,—by casting it back into the ocean from whence it came. The Norfolk dyke was after a few failures again reared up; the flood-gates again were fixed; the tall chimneys again smoked; the restless pumps again worked; and the sluggish Ouse again received into its patient bosom and bore into the sea the wide waste of waters which had wrought such destructive effects. But sin's dark, polluting tide could not be so thrown back, nor the dyke of man's native innocency be again set up. God takes, then, another way to repair the ruin which sin had wrought as a polluting flood. He brings a superabounding tide of free and sovereign grace which shall rise over sin, hide it from view, and completely bury it from the eyes of infinite Justice. We read therefore in our text, "Where sin abounded, grace **did much more abound.**" Sin rushed in upon the soul of man as an abounding flood; but grace comes in upon the soul of man as a superabounding tide—not merely to repair all the mischief which the flood has caused; not merely to remove the deluge and restore the fields to their former verdure; but to cover from view the flood itself by a superabounding tide of blood and love.

The superabounding of grace over the abounding of sin is a most blessed theme, and I may well falter in my tongue to set it forth. But let us endeavour to look at it in the light of revealed truth, and see whether it does not meet all our wants and all our woes.

Look, then, at grace in its **sovereignty**, as issuing out of the bosom of a three-one God. I showed you how sin issued out of the breast of Satan as the flood in Norfolk issued out of the bosom of the German sea. This is, you will remember, a scriptural, though it might seem to you a strange, figure: "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." **Re 12:15** Now grace issues out of the bosom of a triune Jehovah to superabound over the flood of sin which rushed out of the mouth of Satan.

i. The first rising of this began in Jehovah's sovereign councils, and issued forth in the provisions of the eternal covenant "ordered in all things and sure." God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—the three Persons of the glorious Godhead—contrived and entered with each other into an eternal covenant, in which every blessing was provided for the elect of God: a Mediator chosen and set up in the Person of God's dear Son; an atonement of sin determined on in His incarnation, sufferings, bloodshedding, and death; a justification devised in His perfect obedience to the law of God; and a salvation provided which should be "without money and without price" on the part of man, but perfectly effectual for every purpose of God. In this everlasting covenant, then, we have the first rising of that superabounding grace which saves a guilty race by abounding over all the floods of sin.

ii. Now come down from heaven to earth. We have seen the fountain: now look at the stream. View the Son of God coming forth from the bosom of His Father, and assuming the flesh and blood of the children into union with His own divine Person. Then by the eye of faith trace Him through His life of obedience and suffering to the garden in which the

agony began, and to the cross on which the agony was accomplished, and see in the atoning blood, and dying love of Jesus, the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of superabounding grace. See in the sufferings, the bloodshedding, and the sacrifice of the Holy Lamb of God the rising on earth of that tide of heavenly grace which hides, for ever hides, from the sight of eternal Justice the flood of sin, with all its filth and sludge and ooze, which had ruined the image of God in man, and has swept and is still sweeping myriads into an abyss of endless woe.

iii. But look a little further: come down to the appointed time and hour when the Lord was first pleased to arrest you on the broad road to hell, and see how it was sovereign grace which began that work upon your heart which will never die. This is the first springing up—"Spring up, O well"—this is the first springing up of the life of God in the soul which was given you in Christ Jesus before the world began. What else could have met and arrested the tide of sin which was bearing you along? How superabounding was grace over that dreadful flood of sin which was fast hurling you into destruction!

iv. Now come a little further on to the happy day when grace in its superabounding tide burst in upon your soul in a revelation of Christ, in a manifestation of His dying love, in some application of His atoning blood, or some view of Him as bearing your sins in His own body on the tree. Was not this visitation of mercy all of superabounding grace?

v. And now next take another view of this deep, rich, and heavenly tide, and see how grace is daily superabounding over all the aboundings of your sin, and guilt, and filth, and folly; how it heals backslidings, pardons iniquities, covers the naked soul with a robe of righteousness, washes out the

most damning spots, and brings the vanquished rebel to the feet of Christ, to admire and adore the mysteries of His dying love. Can we speak too highly of superabounding grace? I will say for myself there is not in the whole book of God a text I seem to love more than, or so much as this; nor is there a day scarcely in my soul's experience when I have not reason to make mention of it before the Lord, confessing the abounding of my sin and looking to Him for the superabounding of His grace. It is a passage of Scripture very dear to my heart, for it so unfolds two things which I have had so long to learn in daily experience: the abounding of sin in my carnal mind, and the superabounding of grace in the Person and work of the Son of God, in which alone I can have any well grounded hope.

But let us bear in mind that grace has to superabound over the aboundings of sin, not only in covering it from the eyes of God as with an overwhelming tide of love and blood, but also as a **subduing, restraining** stream. There is a most gracious promise in the word of truth, which should be as dear to us as any of those promises which speak of pardoned sin. "He will subdue our iniquities;" and observe the connection between the pardon of sin and the subduing of it, for it adds, "And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." **Mic 7:19** It is not the law but the gospel to which is attached the blessing of sin restrained as well as of sin pardoned. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Why not? "For ye are not under the law but under grace." **Ro 6:14** I showed you before that the law only stirred up sin, as a dam thrown across a flood makes it rise the higher. "Without the law," says the apostle, "sin was dead;" and again, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." **Ro 7:5** But the glory of grace is that whilst it pardons sin, it also subdues it, and, swelling over its

restless tide, holds it down in its bed as by an overwhelming wave.

2. But grace is also represented in our text as a most **benign and clement monarch**. "Sin hath reigned unto death." Shall grace then leave the sceptre in the hand of sin? Shall grace let sin reign over the people of God as it has reigned before, and maintain its usurped dominion? What hereditary right has sin to reign over the family of God? No more right than Pharaoh had to reign over the children of Israel. Are they not redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Is sin therefore ever to hold them fast in its iron chain? No; grace shall come in all the majesty wherewith God has clothed her princely form, shall wrest the sceptre out of the cruel tyrant's hands, break it asunder, dethrone him, and take her seat upon the heart over which sin has ruled with such daring and despotic sway. O how cruelly has sin reigned in the heart of man! Hurrying him on to every, vile abomination, plunging him into every depth of misery and crime, and then hurling him impenitent and unbelieving into an abyss of endless misery!

But sin is not easily dethroned. It will struggle for power to its latest gasp; will seek every opportunity to recover its authority, and will not let the prisoner go until again and again it has made the iron enter into his very soul, and plunged him sometimes almost into the depths of despair. But God's promises are sure; they are all "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." Grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life; and those in whom grace reigns shall themselves reign also: "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Christ Jesus." **Ro 5:17** Is not Christ stronger than Satan? Is not His righteousness greater and of more avail than all man's disobedience? Is not "the grace of God and the gift of grace"

beyond the offence of Adam and all its consequences? As the apostle argues, "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." **Ro 5:15,16** Blessed conclusion to which he brings us! "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." **Ro 5:18,19**

This opens a way for the reign of sovereign grace. The removal of sin by the blood of the Lamb and the gift of righteousness by the obedience of the Son of God, lay open a royal road in which grace as a victorious sovereign comes in the fulness of her triumph. As she thus comes, she sweetly guides, softly controls, and reigns and rules in the bosom, not by law but by gospel, not by threats and terrors, but by the greatest and best of all authority, the authority of love. Grace by her gentle sway, constrains the thoughts, enlarges and ennobles the affections, makes obedience sweet, and thus endears the precept as well as the promise. Grace reigns by bringing about submission to God's will under all trying dispensations, by planting the fear of God deep in the heart, making the conscience alive and tender; by producing brokenness and contrition of spirit; by showing the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and by raising up earnest desires and prayers that it may never be permitted to reign in us and over us as it has reigned before. This is the reign of grace which you must feel and know for yourself as well as its superabounding tide of pardoning love. Has not sin reigned

over you? Have you not eagerly, greedily, in times past followed all its behests, given way to every vile lust and base inclination, and been led captive by it at its will? If, then, the reigning yoke of sin is to be shaken off, and you are to be the loyal subject of sovereign grace, in a similar way, you will have to listen to its inward admonitions, to yield to its subduing restraints, and to be as plainly and evidently under the dominion of grace as you have been under the dominion of sin.

How strongly does the apostle urge this, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." **Ro 6:12,13** To be made free from sin in its reigning power and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, is the distinguishing mark of the people of God. We cannot serve sin and God too. "His servants we are to whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "To be made free from sin and to become servants to God," will here give us "fruit unto holiness," and hereafter "the end everlasting life." **Ro 6:22** The reign of grace must be as conspicuous as the reign of sin, or it may well be asked, "Whose servants are ye?"

But this is the mercy for mourning saints who are sighing and groaning under a body of sin and death, that God has decreed that grace not only **may** reign, but that it **must reign**. Were it left to us, we could no more rescue ourselves from the dominion of sin than the children of Israel could deliver themselves from the house of Egyptian bondage. But they sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage, and their cry came up unto God. He had respect unto His covenant,

and looked upon them and delivered them. **Ex 2:23,25** So God has determined on behalf of His people that sin shall not be their eternal ruin; that it shall not plunge them into crime after crime until it casts them at last into the gulf of endless woe, but that grace "shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life."

But it must reign here as well as hereafter, for by its reign here its eternal triumph is secured. It must then subdue our proud hearts, and never cease to sway its peaceful sceptre over them until it has secured in them absolute and unconditional victory. Now this is what every sincere child of God most earnestly longs to feel and realise. He longs to embrace Jesus and be embraced by Him in the arms of love and affection. As the hymn says,

Yet now, subdued by sovereign grace,  
My spirit longs for Thy embrace.

He hates sin, though it daily, hourly, momentarily works in him, and is ever seeking to regain its former mastery; he abhors that cruel tyrant who set him to do his vilest drudgery, deceived and deluded him by a thousand lying promises, dragged him again and again into captivity, and but for sovereign grace would have sealed his eternal destruction. Subdued by the sceptre of mercy, he longs for the dominion of grace over every faculty of his soul and every member of his body. "O," he says, "let grace reign and rule in my breast; let it not suffer any sin to have dominion over me; let it tame every unruly desire, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Thus, he who truly fears God looks to grace, and to grace only, not merely to save but to sanctify; not only to pardon sin but to subdue it; not only to secure him an inheritance among the saints in light, but to make him meet for it.



3. But there is one feature more in the character of sovereign, distinguishing grace brought before us in our text which I have still to explain, as countervailing the mighty power of sin. From the words, reigning "**unto death,**" I took occasion to describe sin as a **cruel executioner**, whom nothing could satisfy but the death of his victims. In that description we saw how sin, in establishing its reign to the utmost over fallen man, carried out its unrelenting cruelty in sentencing him to three kinds of death,—death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal. Now grace must thoroughly repeal this three-fold sentence, and perfectly undo all that sin has done, or it would not be all-reigning, all-conquering grace. Let us see whether its triumphs extend thus far.

i. Does it, for instance, undo what sin has done by abolishing death **temporal**? Who can say so as long as we have such melancholy proof of the contrary in the sound of every passing bell, in the sight of every yawning grave, every widow's wail, and every orphan's tears? Yet, in spite of all these sounds and sighs of woe, these daily spectacles of mortality, grace does triumph in abolishing death as regards the people of God. Is not this the testimony of the Scripture? Do we not read that the grace which was "given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," is now "made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel?" **2Ti 1:9,10** But how can it have **abolished death** if death still reign? We may thus explain it. Death remains, but its name and nature are changed, for though the saint dies, it is not death to him—it is but sleep.

The word death, therefore, is not often made use of in the New Testament as expressing the decease of the saints. Of

Stephen we read, for instance, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." **Ac 7:60** The Holy Ghost would not allow that Stephen died; He therefore changed the word death into sleep. So we are bidden "not to sorrow for them which are asleep even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." **1Th 4:14** "We shall not all sleep," that is, die, says the apostle, "but we shall all be changed." **1Co 15:51** In this way death itself to the saint of God is turned into sleep. It has not only lost its sting and is robbed of its victory, but has lost also its name and its nature; so that when the saint, after a life of faith and suffering, is at last laid down in his grave, it is but as the laying of a babe in the cradle by its watchful mother, that it may rest in sleep till the time of its waking. The resurrection morn will come, the trumpet will sound, "the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." **1Th 4:16** Then the sleeping dust will be raised—not as it was deposited in the tomb in corruption, in dishonour, and weakness, but in incorruption, in glory, and power, meet companion for an immortal soul, and designed to dwell for ever with Christ in indissoluble union in mansions of bliss. Does not grace triumph even here, and take the axe of death out of the hand of the executioner?

ii. But now view the triumph of grace over death **spiritual**. Has not grace reigned over it already in quickening the soul dead in sin? Does not grace give in regeneration a spiritual life, restore the image of God in man so marred and defaced, make the saint of God a new creature in Christ, and thus thoroughly undo that death in sin, that alienation from the life of God which sin executed upon us in the fall? Indeed, without the communication of spiritual life, no other gift of God would be of any avail; for without it there could be no

union with Christ, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit;" and without it there could be no life eternal, for this consists in the spiritual knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

iii. But now view death **eternal**, the awful separation from the presence of God, everlasting banishment into the blackness of darkness for ever. Has not grace met and defeated sin in this field also? There is no second death for the saint of God; for him there is no worm that dieth not, and fire that is not quenched. When he dies he only rises to take possession of that "eternal life" unto which grace must reign.

Our text declares, blessed be God, that grace must "reign unto eternal life;" so that unless grace bring the saint of God through all his troubles and sorrows into the enjoyment of eternal life, it would not be reigning grace, triumphant grace, all-conquering grace, but would fail just where and when it was most needed. This is its chief beauty, this its grand and glorious blessedness, this its distinguishing feature, that it reigns unto "eternal life."

Can we then think too well, can I speak too highly, can I set forth too unreservedly grace like this? Sin, as a destructive tide, stemmed back; sin, as a despotic tyrant, dethroned; sin, as a cruel executioner, met front to front on the battle field by the Captain of our salvation, defeated at every point, his sword wrung from his grasp, and triumphed over unto life eternal!

III. But I must now just drop a few words upon our last point, on which I shall be brief. All these blessings of sovereign grace are "**through righteousness**," and "by Christ Jesus our Lord." Both these points I must speak unto,

and I wish that time allowed me to enter into them more fully, for they are full of grace and glory.

The reign of grace is "**through righteousness,**" and this in several senses.

1. First, all that grace is, has, and does, ever is and ever must be in perfect harmony with the righteousness of God, viewed as being of purer eyes than to behold evil, and as One who cannot look upon iniquity. If any one of God's attributes were to suffer any diminution or infringement, He would cease to be unchanging, unchangeable in all His glorious perfections. We must ever, therefore, bear in mind that in all that God does, He is scrupulously just. The Judge of the whole earth must do right. Grace, therefore, must be in perfect harmony with His eternal and infinite justice. But how can this be? Must not the justice of God suffer if the sinner be unpunished? No. Why? Because the Son of God has obeyed the law which we have broken—obeyed it as we never could have done, and has thus preserved and guarded God's righteousness from suffering the least infringement, nay, rather, has invested His very justice with a new, brighter, and more blessed character. Thus by the obedience of His dear Son, God can now be "just and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." **Ro 3:26**. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." **Ro 5:19** In this sense, grace reigns, "through righteousness," riding as it were in the very chariot of God's justice, and casting rays of divine glory upon that eternal righteousness in which He shines forth with such resplendent majesty and holiness.

2. But look now at the words "through righteousness," as admitting another and equally scriptural sense. There is a righteousness which the Scripture calls "the righteousness of

God," meaning thereby, not the intrinsic righteousness and eternal justice of God as infinitely pure and holy, but his way of saving a sinner through the obedience of His dear Son. In this sense, the apostle uses the expression, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for 'there is no difference.'" In this passage "the righteousness of God" means the way which God takes of saving sinners through Christ's righteousness, as is evident from what follows, that "there is no difference" between one saved sinner and another, either as regards sin or justification from sin, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," so that there is no difference there; and all "are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" so that there is no difference there. Through this righteousness, then, grace superabounds over the abounding of sin, and reigns, gloriously and triumphantly reigns, unto eternal life. Grace, therefore, flows, not as a wild waste of waters over the world, without any banks to restrain and guide its course, but it flows "through righteousness." Thus it flows in perfect harmony with every righteous attribute of God; one bank is His eternal holiness, the other is His infinite justice; the channel between them, so to speak, is the perfect obedience of His righteous Son. Through this channel, then, the superabounding tide of grace flows; and thus not only the mercy of God is declared, but also His righteousness, as the apostle speaks, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." **Ro 3:21,22,26**

3. "Through righteousness" also does grace reign as regards its administration, for Christ's sceptre is a righteous sceptre. So God Himself calls it when He addressed him in ancient

prophecy, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." **Ps 45:6** Thus, also, we read, "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness" **Isa 32:1**; and of Him it is declared that "he shall judge thy people with righteousness and thy poor with judgment." **Ps 72:2**

4. But there is still another sense in which we may take the words. If grace superabound over sin and wrest the sceptre out of its hand, it is to bring forth those "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God." **Php 1:11** Grace never leads to sin, but to holiness. The superabounding tide of grace fertilises the soil wherever it comes; for like the river Nile, it carries fertility in its very waters, and manifests itself by the crops of every good word and work which it produces. Its reign is one of beneficence, of doing good to the bodies and souls of men; and thus as it sits enthroned in the believing heart, it manifests its authority by constraining its happy subject to live to the honour and glory of God.

But now a few words upon that expression which seems so fully and blessedly to crown the whole, "**by Jesus Christ our Lord.**" It is all by Jesus Christ. All grace, first and last, is in Him and by Him; for "it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell;" therefore a fulness of grace, for "of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." No human merit, no creature works, no natural righteousness have place here. It is a pure temple of grace. No sound therefore "of hammer or axe or any tool of iron is to be heard" in this temple while it is in building. **1Ki 6:7** Like the pure river of water of life which John saw proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it is "clear as crystal"—unsullied, unmuddied, unpolluted by human merit or demerit.

And as it is "by Jesus Christ," so it is by Him as "our Lord." Is He not worthy of the name? Has he not a right to all we are and have? Is He not "our Lord," to whom we owe our heart's best obedience? "Our Lord," before whose footstool we reverently bow; "our Lord," at whose feet we humbly lie; "our Lord," to whom we look to reign in us and over us by His sovereign grace; "our Lord," of whom and to whom we may well say, "O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." **Isa 26:13**

I leave what I have said to your consideration. Be assured it is well worthy of your deepest thought and most careful meditation. But as "power belongeth wholly unto God," I will now only add, may the Lord, the Spirit, if it be His will, seal what I have spoken this morning with His own unction upon your heart and conscience!