

A GOOD GOVERNMENT

A SERMON

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“The powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” Matthew 24:29

WE have already shown that the heavens here mean the Jewish government; and that that government therefore was in all its departments to be shaken, subverted, and overturned. This is the literal meaning of our text. And I propose this morning to notice in the first place, *the nature of that government*; secondly, *the sin that obscured that government, together with the consequent judgment*; third and lastly, *the advice which the Savior gave under these circumstances to his disciples*.

First. First, then we notice, *the nature of that government*. The Jewish government was typical of the government of the Lord Jesus Christ; and I may, passing by circumstantialia, and attend simply to the essentials, I may take a fourfold view of that government, and you will see how the Savior answers in every particular as the anti-type to that government; that heaven, or those heavens, were shaken and passed away; but the heavens which the Savior has established, the new heavens and the new earth, his world, his kingdom, shall remain forever; that is that which cannot be shaken, cannot be moved. Now these are four essentials, then, in this government. The first was that of the mercy seat; the second was that of the priesthood; the third was that of the royalty; and the fourth was that of the covenant into which the Lord entered with that nation. First there was the mercy seat. See how suitable this is unto poor sinners; this is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find in Isaiah 22, that the Savior is spoken of as the throne; “He shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s house;” which the apostle calls a throne of grace; and he is called a throne because it is by him that mercy is maintained, it is by him that grace reigns. And this same person you will find is a person that sympathizes with the objects of his government; and hence, it is said of him there in Isaiah 22, that “he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And you will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s House.” This is included in the declaration, “You shall have no other gods but me; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul.” And when brought to know the Lord in the greatness of his mercy in Christ Jesus, after that order described by the apostle Peter when he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again into a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” And it is a remarkable thing that the very word “Eliakim,” the name of the person

spoken of in Isaiah 24, signifies the resurrection of God; as though the Lord intended to point especially to the Savior and that victory which he should achieve by his death, and that he should thus rise from the dead, and his people be governed by his mercy. Let us pause for one moment here; and then you will see that that which the Jews in which the professing world at large so readily gave up is the very last thing for the real Christian to give up; for where the work of the Lord is real, it is sure to convince us of our need of mercy; it is sure to show to the sinner that he is by every jot and tittle of God's eternal law condemned; and such a one is made to feel that without mercy he must be eternally lost; and that this mercy is in Christ Jesus the Lord; he is the throne; he is the way where mercy and truth meet together, where righteousness and peace embrace each other. Let us be brought, where we are, I trust, brought most of us to know that it is here that the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting; and that he deals with us, he dealt with us in choosing us, and giving us to Christ, and imputing our sins to Christ, and imputing the work of Christ to us, and calling us by his grace, and he deals with us daily, and he will deal with us all our life long, and forever, according to the abundance of his mercy, according to the multitude of his mercies. Can you think, my hearer, of a sweeter destiny than that? That the great purpose, or one feature of the great purpose in the gospel, is that the Gentiles should glorify God for his mercy. Here then is a mercy throne that cannot be shaken; this is a throne forever. Hence, David speaks very beautifully of the suitability of this mercy throne in the 63rd Psalm; where, pointing evidently to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to this mercy seat or throne of mercy, it is there said "the Lord reigns;" reigns by his mercy; that where sin has abounded grace does much more abound. And if you need a million times more mercy than you do, there it is in and by Jesus Christ the Lord; and for that man that has faith enough to believe that Christ is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Now the Psalmist I say, in the 93rd Psalm, gives us a beautiful idea of this stability of the Lord's throne. And you will take notice of this, if you want to understand the Scriptures and think them worth understanding, which I trust most of you do, that in the 93rd Psalm the kingdom of Christ is called a world; "the world is established, and it cannot be moved." That world evidently means the kingdom of Christ. I have shown last Lord's day morning, that the nations or kingdoms of this world are sometimes called worlds; and so there, in the 93rd Psalm, the kingdom of Christ is called a world. And then it goes on to speak of his throne; "Your throne is established of old; you are from everlasting." Here is the throne of Christ. But then there are the floods of our sins, and there were the floods of God's wrath, and there were the floods of ungodly men, and there were the floods of Jordan, shall I say, and the floods of tribulation; but what is written concerning these floods? "The floods were lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yes, than the mighty waves of the sea. Your testimonies are very sure; Holiness becomes your house, or Lord forever." Here then is a throne that defies sin, defies wrath, defies death, defies tribulation, overcomes everything, whereby the testimonies are sure; the promises here differing from the Jewish government, where the promises were yea and nay, or at least conditional; here they are yea and amen; "holiness becomes your house O Lord forever;" because by Jesus Christ sin is eternally put away. The truth, then, of the mercy of God by the sacrifice of Christ, is the last truth the real Christian would give up. It is true that, generally speaking, it is the last truth that they learn, the last truth that they thoroughly and fully appreciate. I am sure when I was in the depths of soul trouble, if I had known only half what I know now of Jesus Christ, and the mercy of God by him, why, the ministers I heard I should have run away from the whole of them; there was not one within my reach the least use to me; because they did not come down into the real miseries I felt; nor set forth the amplitudes of God's mercy in the way that suited me; and I did not know that

there was such mercy, I did not know that Jesus Christ was such a Jesus Christ as I have since, to my salvation and unutterable joy found him to be; and we shall find him to be more, I was going to say, then sufficient; for, as I have already said, where sin has abounded grace does much more abound. Now of this antitypical throne it is said, "They shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house." See how true this is; you cannot glorify God without Christ; hang upon him all the glory of his father's house;" all depends upon him; "the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity; right" vessels of mercy I apprehend are here meant however small they are; little faith, still they depend upon Christ; "from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons;" little faith leans upon him, hangs upon him; all other hopes taken away; and such are brought to see, and feel, and know that it is of the Lord's mercy they are not consumed. Then how nicely the Savior answers to this part of the Jewish government, the mercy seat. The mercy seat is gone; but there is a throne of grace by Christ Jesus that is eternal. "Unto the son he says, your throne, O God, is forever and ever." Then the second part of their government was sacrifice. And I cannot do better upon this part of the subject than just name that beautiful scripture alluding to the Savior, but by reflex of course alluding to the sacrificial service under that dispensation; "There shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." Sin there seems to refer, at least the fountain there seems to refer in the first place to the annual atonement. There was the great day of atonement, on the 10th day of the seventh month; and that was their annual atonement; and that one atonement, as the apostle has shown very beautifully, typifies Christ's one atonement; so that the Lord Jesus Christ by his one atonement, like that great day of atonement, by which they were reckoned to set the nation right for one year. Now that is a type, and of course it is but a type, of the sacrifice of Christ; he by one sacrifice has set his people right to all eternity; there they are by that sacrifice holy as he is, safe as he is, glorious as he is; and they are governed by this; not only does the Lord graciously deal with us according to this, but we ourselves, and our hopes, and prayers, and affections, and pursuits, are governed by this atonement; we cannot do anything against this atonement, because we feel, and see, and know that there is exemption from death and hell nowhere else but in the perfect work of Christ. The other part I so very much admire is, "and for uncleanness"; and that after this annual atonement persons contracted ceremonial uncleanness from time to time; between the two annual days a person may contract during that 12 months uncleanness a very great many times, by touching a dead body, and in a variety of ways may contract uncleanness. Now there was a provision made, there were offerings; he was to come with an offering for his ceremonial uncleanness; because without this offering for the uncleanness he could not eat of the Passover, he could not eat of the holy things; yes, he could not join in the service of the Lord, unless there were these offerings for this uncleanness. Now see, my hearer, here is a poor sinner brought to realize the pardon of his sin, and to know that he is complete in the Lord Jesus Christ. And thousands of the people of God, when they have been brought into that state to realize pardoning mercy, and to walk in that peace which passes all understanding, and to be more happy in the Lord than language can describe, they have comforted themselves under these circumstances in some degree, while they have had true comfort, they have comforted themselves also with some degree of false comfort; for such a one has said, Well now that my sins are gone, I shall never sin again, I shall never stumble again, I shall never be the subject of infirmity again; sin is gone, Satan is gone, the world is gone, and wrath is gone, and all is gone; and heaven is come, and Christ is come, and I am happy, happy, and happy forever. This is the kind of dream which, for the want of knowing better, mingles with our first enjoyment of eternal things. And looking back at the time when the Lord first brought me into the enjoyment of that perfection that is in Christ: why, I didn't believe that I should have another wrong thought as long as I live. I could

not read a chapter without enjoying it; I could not meditate nor think of the things of God without being happy. Alas! alas! how infinitely different things have turned out from that which I expected; for the Lord in all the manifestations of his mercy, he does by those manifestations prepare us for something; and so after this you have to experience the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep within; after this the very dregs of hell shall rise in your heart and mind; and if you seem to wash you and make you ever so clean, you shall be again plunged into the ditch, your own clothes shall abhor you. O, you will say, what means this? What a mystery is this, how can I understand this? Why, if it were not so, you would turn your enjoyment into a God; you would forget God, and forget Christ, and forget mercy, and forget salvation, and forget that feature of his offering that I am now dwelling upon, namely, that he has not only atoned and put away our sins relatively, but that his atonement continues with us, and is and its application again and again keeps up our hope, and keeps us in the service of God. Here is the atonement of Christ as typified by the offering for fresh contracted sin; here is the atonement of Christ again, and again. Yes, I need not, that I know of, have been so definite in one respect relative to the offerings appointed for the removal of ceremonial uncleanness; because there is another circumstance in that dispensation that would perhaps have conveyed the idea just as clearly, and perhaps more so; and that is that there was the daily sacrifice; there was the lamb in the morning; so that in the morning if I am a sinner there is a sacrifice for me; and if in the evening I am a sinner, there is a sacrifice for me, there is a sacrifice to make me lie down in safety, and to give me hope in the Lord that he will take care of me, viewing me by the sacrifice; and if in the morning I am afraid to go forth, for I am that sinner I feel I am not worthy that the Lord should be with me; and if he is not with me I shall make some fatal mistake or other. The real Christian says, well, but here is the sacrifice in the morning, let me go forth to my calling, whatever it may be, and I will go in the strength of the Lord, "I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only."

The third part of their government was that of royalty. And what was the use that wicked kings made of their power, the kings of Judah I mean especially, as Manasseh, Zedekiah, and many others? The use they made of the royalty was to put down the truth of God, to put down the people of God, to persecute those that love the truth. Hence Jeremiah had to stand against the princes, and kings, and priests, and people. But yet that royalty when properly used, as we see in the case of David, and in the first part of the reign of Solomon, what a blessing it was to them. Now this royalty is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ; he is the King of Zion; and he is that King that is pointed to in the 17th of Deuteronomy, "You may not set a stranger over you, which is not your brother; but he whom the Lord your God shall choose; one from among your brethren shall you set as king over you." And as we see in that chapter, so we see in the character of the Savior; his heart was not to be lifted up above his brethren; and so the Savior's heart was not lifted up above his brethren. We have often noticed, and must repeat it this morning, that when the Savior shall appear in the infinite majesty of his person and the glory of his kingdom at the last great day; even in the character as King see how he owns the meanest of his brethren and, "Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my brethren you did it unto me." Here then is mercy to be governed by; here is a sacrificial perfection, eternal in that perfection, to be governed by; here is a King who is meek and lowly in heart; and defines his government very beautifully when he says, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, you shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Here then, is another department that can never be shaken. The fourth department of that government was that of the covenant. The Lord entered into a covenant with them; here in

lay their distinction from all other people; he entered into no such covenant with any people upon the face of the earth as he did with the Israelites; and it was one of their privileges to know that it was the Lord that put the difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites. And there was no such covenant anywhere that we have any acquaintance with as that covenant by which the Lord has entered into relationship with his people, the anti-type of the first covenant; and Christ is spoken of, as you are aware, as the mediator of this covenant. David, you know how he sums it up, "it is an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." This is then about the substance of that government under which the people of God are brought; constrained by the mercy of God, or as we say, by the love of God, united to God by the sacrifice of Christ, to be swerved from him no more forever; governed by his royalty, he reigning as the king in Zion, breaking to pieces every oppressor, and causing the mountains and the hills to bring peace unto the people; and he reigns by their consent, for they are willing that he should reign, and that forever and ever. Here is a covenant that is eternally confirmed. This brings us to the very heart, shall I say, of the counsel and precious thoughts of the blessed God.

Second. Now I notice the next place *the sin by which their government was obscured*. And this again will remind us, of the awfulness of error. People do not, generally speaking, think there is much harm in error; but would that I could set it forth this morning in this part of my subject in those dark colors which properly belong to it. First then they had passed over in a great measure the love of God. Hence, we see in Malachi, "I have loved you, says the Lord; yet you say where in have you loved us?" There is the sovereignty of his love denied, human invention put into the place thereof; so that by their going as shown in the preceding chapter to which we have referred before, turning things upside down, they took away the real intention of the mercy seat altogether; and in taking away the real intention of the mercy seat, they thereby forsook God; they got away from the one great principal, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." Then again as to the sacrifices, we see that they offered the sick, and the lame, and the blind; anything will do they said. The priesthood was corrupt; as to the royalty, we have seen what use they made of that; as to God's covenant, they forsook all, and set up the traditions of the elders. And so it is; tradition is a very powerful thing; we see it in the Roman Catholic Church, and we see it in the Church of England; children are taught errors in the Church of England quite as gross as some of the errors that are taught in the Roman Catholic Church. Are not, for instance, children taught in the Church of England to believe in baptismal regeneration? Are they not taught to believe in priestly absolution? Are they not taught to believe in the stupid doctrine of confirmation; and many other ridiculous things and errors the children are taught. Now these errors, what was the result of the errors of the Pharisees in that day? The simple fact was this; that when the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the substance of the Old Testament Scriptures, when he came, they knew him not; and how was it that they did not know him? Merely because they were led by error, by false doctrine. Could they have understood their own book, that he was the King pointed to in Deuteronomy 17; that he was the Priest pointed out in the hundred 10th Psalm; that he was the King pointed out in the 45th Psalm, and that he was the Mediator of that covenant that David spoke of in his dying hour; but no; these things were all laid aside, and human tradition put in their place. It is needless to say that in their day there were some few that did know the Lord; but then they owed that acquaintance with the Lord to that discriminating grace by which he has been in all ages known, and without which no one can savingly know him. Now let us look at their sin. What was the sin that obscured their government altogether? The sin that completed

the obscuration of their sun, the sin by which their sun went down, and they are left in darkness to this day; the sin by which their moon was turned into blood, and so remains to this day; the sin by which their stars, their rulers, fell from their heavens, and so remained to this day, was that of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ. What a mysterious circumstance! You see what multitudes of peoples were led by their rulers; they were all depending upon their rulers; "have any of their rulers believed in him?" You see, what we want is for each to understand truth for himself; for each to judge for himself. And we have to bless the Lord for the sweet privilege of having the Bible in our own hands, and to be guided by no man, but to be guided by the Lord himself; to judge for ourselves, to know the truth for ourselves as it is in Jesus. Now they having committed that great sin, then, of putting to death the Son of God, their government is forever gone. Now the Savior then foretells the dreadful consequences of this. But I just notice in contrast to their government in this part of our subject that while that kingdom is shaken the Savior's kingdom cannot be shaken. And the apostle Paul evidently felt very deeply the importance of receiving the truth and abiding by the truth and holding fast the truth; and he shows that the man who is an enemy to the gospel while he professes to be a friend is in some respects worse off than those under that dispensation. Hence, he speaks in this way; "See that you refuse not him that speaks," from heaven. Who is the apostle thus speaking to? He is not speaking to unbelievers, he is speaking to profess Christians; he is writing to the Hebrews; and he says to these Hebrews, some of whom he stood in doubt of; they seem disposed to lean to something ceremonial, to something that could not stand by them in the day of trial; they seem to show some species of inclination towards that that was not the gospel of God, that was not the truth of God; therefore he says, "See that you refuse not him that speaks. For if they escape not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven." Now a former part of the epistle to the Hebrews will explain in that, where the apostle says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" That is to say, that when the Israelites set aside the mercy seat, set aside that sacrificial service, and so despised the law of Moses, that Israelite received the penalties of so doing in his own person. Now then, how shall we escape, receiving the penalties of sin in our own persons, if we refuse that testimony by which there is a Surety who has in his own person endured the penalty of sin? What we want is a person that did endure the penalties of sin in his own person; and if we refuse him that speaks from heaven, that brings a testimony that Christ bore our sin in his own body on the tree, that he poured out his soul unto death; if we profess to be Christians, and yet refuse the real testimony of God concerning what Christ has done; then as every transgression met with the just recompense of reward, so we, if we refuse in the life and love thereof the full testimony of what Christ has done, must receive the penalties of sin in our own person; whereas if we receive his truth, then we shall not receive the penalties of sin in our own persons, because in receiving his truth we receive one who has received the penalties of sin for us. This is the meaning of the apostle when he says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" The term *neglect* carries with it an idea of making light of, despising, or speaking against; it does not mean mere neglect; it means something more than what on the mere surface of these words might at first sight appear. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Jesus Christ has borne the penalties of sin in his own person, and has accomplish salvation; and if we are not concerned for that salvation, if we make light of that salvation, think little of that salvation; if we refuse him, while we profess to be Christians that speaks from heaven; how can we escape receiving the penalties of sin in our own persons? I am sure it is one, and most of you know it is one of the sweetest truths of the gospel that Jesus Christ did bear the penalties of sin in his own person; and by our receiving him who thus bore the penalties of sin in his own person, we escape; but "if they

escape not who refuse him that spoke on earth; whose voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only; but also heaven.” The heavens there mean the Jewish heaven; and the Jewish heavens were shaken, their sun went down, their moon went down, as we have shown, their stars are fallen; and their land has been for 1800 years the scene of darkness and desolation; and their sun will rise no more, their moon will rise no more, their stars will rise no more. Men talk to us about the Jews returning to Canaan. What in the name of common sense should they return to Canaan for? They will never anymore return to Canaan than I shall; nor is there one Scripture in all the Bible that authorizes such an idea. What do we want with the Jewish nation? Nationality is not essential to salvation. The religion of the Son of God is not a national, but an individual religion; and if God were to convert every Jew now, he would not wish to go to Canaan, but to God, to go to Christ. So that their sun shall rise no more; it is gone and gone forever. There is now but one sun, and that is Christ; there is but one moon, and that is the gospel; there is but one order of stars, and that is the prophetic and apostolic stars; they shine in these gospel heavens, and will go down no more forever, for they shall shine forever and ever. Hence the apostle says that these remain. “This world,” he says, “signifies the removing of those things that are shaken,” namely, the Jewish heavens; “that these things which cannot be shaken,” namely, the gospel heavens, Christ’s mercy seat, Christ’s atonement, Christ’s reign, Christ covenant, these things cannot be shaken; “that these things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” I must confess that I prefer the marginal to the textual reading; I think it is perhaps more consistent with the original; “Let us hold fast grace;” that is as though some of them were somewhat giving up the truth; “let us hold fast grace;” let us hold fast the testimony of grace; “let us hold fast grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear;” so that we can serve God acceptably only by grace. “It is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.” Receiving these testimonies then, that cannot be shaken, that is the idea; the heavens and the earth may pass away, but his words cannot be shaken; let us hold fast grace, the testimony of grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and with godly fear.

Third. Now on the approach of these judgments *the Savior gives his people advice*; and I must not stop, for time, or at least space will not allow, to dwell upon any of the circumstances connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. Suffice it to say, that before the entire encompassing of the city took place there were several approaches to the city by the Roman armies, which went away again. Cestius Gaulls, for instance, for one, went away, though he could not take the city; and that afforded the Christians an opportunity to take the advice given in this chapter. The Savior advised them what to do. “Let him that is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house;” but go off for his life at once; “neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes;” for he will have no time. They had a very narrow escape, humanly speaking, had not Cestius Gaulls withdraw his army the Christians could not have got out; he withdrew his army, not away long, just gave them time to get out; so, they had to be in a hurry. Here is the advice. It is a mercy to be guided by the Lord, friends; or else we are sure to go too fast or too slow, too much to the right or too much to the left, sure to go wrong; but when he is pleased to guide us, he makes a way, gives us to see the way, helps us to embrace the opportunity, and to escape when we may escape. Then the Lord teaches us to pray again in this advice for mitigation of our troubles. He says, “Pray that your flight be not in winter, nor on the Sabbath day.” And it seems the Christians did pray for this, for their flight was not in the winter; the city was taken on August 5th, in the

year 70; and the last stronghold of Zion destroyed on September 2nd, not quite a month later; so that their flight, it appears, was not in the winter and the reason why he advised them to pray for this week was because of their being exposed, neither house, nor home, nor friends; they could endure it better in the summer than in the winter. So that taking in what it suggests it simply shows the Christian may pray with Habakkuk, "Lord in wrath remember mercy."