

THE TWO GREAT APOSTACIES

A SERMON

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“That he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must he loosed a little season.”

Revelation 20:3

WE have now had three sermons upon this chapter, taking as I do this thousand years mystically, not to denote any period of time known to man, but to denote a period of time known only to God, and that it means the gospel dispensation at large. In our first sermon we showed the conquest of the adversary, or the victory the Savior wrought over him at the beginning of this dispensation, the limitations that the Savior then put upon him. In our second sermon we showed that the souls of the martyrs here spoken of denote the souls of all the Lord's people, because they all have a martyr's soul or a martyr's spirit. Then, last Lord's day morning, our business was to show the present death and future life of the lost; that, while all by nature are dead, yet some are regenerated, and they who are regenerated are said to be interested in the first resurrection because they are interested in Christ's resurrection, and because they are regenerated, and because they shall be raised from the dead first at the last day, but the rest of the dead lived not again. The rest of the dead had lived in the first Adam, but they shall not live again until the end of this dispensation, then they shall rise into that penal life in which they must forever dwell. Some have thought that the words, “the rest of the dead lived not again,” is language not suited to express the interpretation which I have given; some have thought the living again implies the same kind of life that they had lived before. But then you will find no example of this, with the exception of the few who were restored to mortal life. Why, the Savior died, and he lived again; but he lived again a very different life from that which he had previously lived; although his previous life was sinless, it was nevertheless a life of humiliation; he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, he lived his whole life a life of suffering, and he died a death of suffering; and now he has risen from the dead to live again, but to live another kind of life altogether. And so, the saints of God, they died in Adam, and by regeneration, and by Christ Jesus, they lived again. Hence “he has begotten us again unto a lively hope,” but to a very different life from that which we possessed in the first Adam. Here is, therefore, you perceive, another life, very different from the first life. And so the lost lived in the first Adam relatively, but they will not live again, the whole of them, not in the full sense of the word, until they rise to that penal life to which they shall at the last great day be raised. And there are four theories, the outlines of which are pretty clearly marked, that are held by those who think

that this thousand years lies still in the future. I had intended just to have named those four theories this morning, and to have shown how this chapter cuts every one of those theories up; but I will not do so. I will let those four houses of false refuge stand a week or two longer, and then down they must come; and I make these remarks just to give the tenants of those houses notice to quit, and if they don't, down must come their houses about their ears, when I come to that part of the subject. And I am sure, if I should drive them out of a bad house into a good house, out of an unsafe one into a safe one, out of an empty one into a full one, out of one devised by man into the one not made with hands, they will afterwards be glad of the change, though none of us like to leave our old places of abode, if we can possibly help it.

Now, before I enter upon the subject, I must just explain what appears to me to be the meaning of Satan deceiving the nations no more; I think that this declaration must be understood comparatively, and with great limitation. You are all aware that there are many scriptures that contain the language of universality, and nevertheless their meaning is limited by the subject to which they are joined; there are other scriptures that cannot be understood absolutely, but only comparatively. And so here I do not apprehend it means that Satan should not carry on his work of deception, and that to a dreadful extent, during the whole of this thousand years. I think this is beyond all dispute, for we find, at the end of the thousand years, that Ezekiel's Gog and Magog, spoken of in the 38th and 39th of Ezekiel, appear again; and Satan had during this gospel dispensation deceived all these; so that his deceiving the nations no more must be understood in some peculiar sense, that will agree with the gospel dispensation; and that peculiar sense will, I think, this morning come before us.

I will just give a sample or two of what I have now said that there are scriptures, the meaning of which, though the language be universal, is necessarily special and limited. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." You see there the word "world" means only those that God has loved. And, again, "Christ is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." There, again, the word "world" is limited to the sheep of Christ; he laid down his life for the sheep.

Then, again, of the Holy Spirit, "He shall convince the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment." Was there ever an age in which all were convinced of sin, of righteousness, and judgment? There never was, and there never will be.

So that the word "world" there is limited by such a verse as this, "All your children shall be taught of the Lord." The word "world," therefore, means all that are quickened and shall be quickened by the Spirit of God. Then, again, while you must understand some scriptures, though they seem universal, according to the subject to which they belong, there are other scriptures that you must understand comparatively and not absolutely. For instance, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." I make no hesitation in saying that there is not a Christian under the whole canopy of heaven that does not at times sinfully cleave to the world, that does not at times sinfully love the world, that does not at times sinfully fall in with the world; and yet it there says, "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You must understand it, therefore, comparatively; and the meaning must be explained by another scripture, "If any man love father or mother more than me;" so, if any man loves the world more than he loves Christ, so as to forsake the ways of the Lord, to forsake the fear of the Lord, to forsake the faith of the gospel, and to

forsake the gospel, and to forsake the Lord, then that love of the world is fatal to him. But if you take it in the comparative sense, that the Christian, while he has a nature that loves the world, yet with all his love to the world there is something that he loves better, and that something is God in Christ and Christ in God, God in the gospel and the gospel in God, that is the sense in which it must be understood. And then, again, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." There is not a man under heaven that knows his own heart that will deny that there are times when he does regard covetous desires. Are you always content with your lot? never rebel, never murmur, never complain, never wish you had a little more than you have; never a temptation, never an inclination? And do you not sometimes nurse these things in your heart? There are times when the best man under heaven does it. Take that scripture in the absolute sense: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." And David follows up the words, and says, "But the Lord has heard me." Therefore, it must be understood in the comparative sense. If I love the iniquity of my heart more than I love the truth; if I follow that more than I follow the truth, and the love of God, and the ways of God, then it shows that I am a hypocrite, and the Lord will not hear me. There are times when the Christian groans under the burden of sin, and there are times when he does not. There are times when everything spiritual seems neutralized, and he has to say with the poet,

"Hardly sure can they be worse,
That never heard his name."

Thus, then, you will observe, that if the Scriptures, apart from the Holy Ghost, were able to make us wise unto salvation, then we should not need the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are so written that none can rightly understand them but those that are born of God. Thus, then, the word "world" is limited by the subject to which it belongs. The scriptures that I have quoted must be understood in their comparative sense, that though we love the world, and even regard iniquity in our hearts, yet there is something we love better, and there is something we regard more, and that is, as I have said, Christ in God and God in Christ; he maintains through it all his supremacy. And so here, "Satan should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season."

Now, there are two periods of time which are analogous one to the other, and Satan did at one of these periods bring his delusions to such a climax that he had never brought them to before, and he has never brought his delusions to that climax since; so that he has never been able since so to deceive the nations as he did at that period, and he will never be able to bring his delusions to that climax again until towards the end of the world, towards the end of this dispensation; then shall Satan once more bring his delusions to a climax analogous to the period I refer to, and which I will presently explain, and these two periods are strongly analogous one to the other. And they are before us as the end of two dispensations. There is the end of one dispensation, about the time of which Satan had brought the universally professing church so completely under his delusions as to fit them for anything; there was not anything that the devil desired that he had not fitted the professing church for, such was the fearful climax that he reached. So, at the end of this thousand years, at the end of this dispensation, he shall again marshal his Gog and his Magog spoken of in this very chapter, and he shall carry on his delusions to such an extent that they shall be, like their prototypes, fitted for anything villainous, anything murderous, anything demoniacal; they shall be as bad as the devil himself could wish them to be. Now these are declarations all of which will come out as we go along.

I will notice, then, *a threefold analogy between the two periods*. The first period, of course, to which I refer, in which Satan had brought his delusions to such a climax, is the day of Christ, the end of the Jewish dispensation; the second period, and last period, too, with him, is the end of this dispensation.

Let us now look, then, at a threefold analogy. First, as to *the state of the people*; second, *that, as Satan met with a tremendous over throw at the end of one dispensation, he shall meet, analogous to that, with his final over-throw at the end of another dispensation*; and, third, *as the Lord took care of his little few then, at the end of that dispensation, so he will take care of his little few, the remnant according to the election of grace, at the end of this dispensation*.

Let us look, then, at the climax to which he had arrived. It was this, that vital godliness was all but unknown. But before I bring in a description of the delusion under which the whole professing church at that time was, it may be well for me, in order to make the matter clear, to describe what vital godliness is. I have said that vital godliness was, at that period when the Savior appeared in our world, so declined and so gone, that the whole of the Jewish church were destitute as a church; like the barren fig-tree, they were dead, and under total darkness, and destitute of vital godliness, and so it shall be at the end of this dispensation, and nothing but that which was artificial and superficial governed them. Let us ascertain, then, in order to make the matter more clear, what vital godliness is, in order that we ourselves may see whereabouts we are, whether we are still deceived by Satan, whether Satan is preparing us for his future service, whether he is preparing us for diabolical deeds he would like to set us about hereafter, or whether we are rescued from his power, and whether we are brought under the forming hand of that almighty mercy referred to when the Lord says, happy for us if that be true of us, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." What, then, is vital godliness in distinction from Satanic delusion? Vital godliness is this; it is to be brought to feel that sin and death have reigned in your soul, and over you, to your entire ruin; that sin and death have deprived you of every particle of holiness, righteousness, strength, and goodness, and that you are left a mere collection of ruins, that you are a ruined man, that you are destitute of one particle of that of which the spiritual, pure, and eternal law of God can approve, and if you were to live a thousand years you would be no better, but you would be worse at the end of that time than you are now. If you are brought to feel this, you will feel your need of that grace that reigns by pardon and by power, and you will see that by the atonement of Jesus Christ there is all the forgiveness that you can need, grace reigns by pardon, that there is all the sanctification, and justification, and salvation, and blessedness that you can need. You will feel your need of this. And this grace, reigning by pardon and by power, is what the Savior rejoices in. Your very character, if this be your character, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven is first a kingdom of grace, and then becomes a kingdom of glory. If you are brought thus to feel your need of grace reigning by pardon, and it is the grace of Almighty God, the grace of an infinite God, the grace of an eternal God, and eternally sure, if your sins were ten million times more than they are, that grace can pardon the whole, if you are thus poor, and conscious of this, you have vital godliness, and the testimony that grace does reign is a testimony you will lay hold of by faith; you cleave to it. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Vital godliness, then, brings you under this reign of grace; vital godliness brings you into the consolation of eternal salvation; vital godliness brings you into the rest into which Christ has entered; vital godliness gives us this hunger and thirst after

that righteousness which alone can fill us; vital godliness will thus make us merciful, and unite us, and fix us too, on the side of mercy. Vital godliness is purity of heart; you will not be a hypocrite you will be sincere. Whatever guile there may be in the flesh, there will be none in your spirit. Let us do all the good we can, and so let our light shine before men, that they may glorify God in the day of visitation, and, after all they have said against us, be constrained to acknowledge that our path through life has been very different from theirs. Vital godliness, also, is that which will stand by the truth through all tribulation: "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake, rejoice in that day, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Now, this is vital godliness; and this vital godliness receives into the soul, and the soul abides by the truth as it is in Jesus. This is that vital godliness that was lost when the Savior appeared, until he brought it again to light; and this is that vital godliness that, amidst the clash and prevalence of delusions, shall at the end of this dispensation once more be all but lost. Satan shall be loosed, and shall spread his armies like locusts, darkening the spiritual atmosphere, and beclouding everything spiritual, and bringing men under all that delusion that shall fit them for the worst of purposes. There are eight beatitudes in the 5th of Matthew, there are eight woes in the 23rd of Matthew; and it is very evident that each woe has direct reference to each beatitude, and that if you bring one woe after the other, that is, the matter contained in each woe, you will see what an entire antagonism there is between the religion of the Son of God and the religion of the flesh. In the first woe it is, "You shut up the kingdom of heaven." How did they do that? By taking the new covenant away; by taking the mediatorial perfection of Christ away; for he is the Mediator, and if you take away his mediatorial perfection, you shut up the kingdom, you take away the gospel of salvation. Some people say, What is the truth? Why, the apostle, in Ephesians, tells you what the truth is, "In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth." What is truth, Paul? Why, he says, "The gospel of your salvation." And then, in Ephesians 2, he tells us that we are saved by grace. Now the first woe, then, was, "You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, neither suffer you them that are entering to go in;" in direct antagonism to the first beatitude, which is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The second woe is, that they "devour widows' houses, and for pretense make long prayers;" in direct opposition to the second beatitude, which says, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Then the third woe is, that they compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, they make him twofold more the child of hell than themselves; in direct opposition to the third beatitude, which says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Then, the fourth woe is that they turn things upside down, and make the gold and the gift sanctify the temple and the altar, instead of making the temple and the altar sanctify the gold and the gift; in direct opposition to the fourth beatitude, which says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Then, in the fifth woe they pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cumin, and pass over the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; in direct antagonism to the fifth beatitude, which says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." And so, in the sixth woe, they make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, while the inside is full of extortion and excess; a sort of church-rate, tithe-taking sort of professors. They were looking simply after the world; in direct opposition to the sixth beatitude, which says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." In the seventh woe they appear there righteous before men, like whited sepulchres, in direct opposition to the seventh beatitude, which says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." In the eighth woe there comes out their hypocrisy: "You build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the

sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the day of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets;" while all the time their hearts were full of murderous enmity against the truth and against Christ; in direct opposition to the eighth and last beatitude: and while the Savior pronounces a woe upon them, "How can you escape the damnation of hell?" this stands in direct opposition to the eighth beatitude, which says of the poor, the mourner, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, the man that suffers for righteousness' sake, his reward is great in heaven; but those that belong to the other religion cannot escape the damnation of hell. Such, then, was their religion. It commenced with shutting up the kingdom of God, and it terminated, as all such religion must, in the damnation of their souls; and so, it shall be at the end of this dispensation. And these people, these Jews, were by this state of things prepared for anything. Their enmity was so intense; their malice, through their false doctrines, was so great, that there were no people under the canopy of heaven so hardened against God's truth as were the very people who possessed that truth in the letter of it. Why, if the Savior had gone to Sodom and Gomorrah, or other heathen cities, and have wrought the miracles he did, and have borne the testimony he did, they would have felt what the Ninevites felt at the preaching of Jonah; they would have repented, and, says the Savior, these cities would have remained to this day. And these Pharisees, they could slander Christ, call him a blasphemer, a friend of publicans and harlots, a wine bibber; they could take away his reputation and finally, in the most blasphemous, the most degrading, and the most demoniacal manner, they crucified the Son of God. Why, they could not sink lower than they were without being in hell itself. Hence, the Savior knew their hearts; knew how Satan's delusions had wrought up their enmity to the highest pitch against the truth; and so, he says, "You vipers, you generation of serpents, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" Here, then, at the beginning of this thousand years was the state of the professed church universal; and so, at the end of this thousand years, it shall be like it.

I have something to say now in relation to the end of this dispensation, which I hope you will see the meaning of, and feel the solemnity and force of, as much as I myself have done. In the 18th chapter of Luke, it is a most remarkable thing that the Savior gives us to understand that the decline of vital godliness commences with the slighting of electing grace; making light of electing grace; making light of the sovereignty of God. Had the Jews ever kept in view how God first chose and distinguished them, never had you read of a golden calf in their midst; never had you read of their human inventions; never had you read of such an accumulation of human traditions and false doctrines. But they lost sight of this; they fell from their first love, apostatized from God's sovereignty; and if you go away from that you go away from everything. It is the last thing the real Christian comes to, and it is the last thing the real Christian will leave. The 18th chapter of Luke is my authority. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bears long with them?" I tell you that "he will avenge them speedily; nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, *shall he find faith on the earth?*" If that be not solemn, I do not know what is. The Savior is there referring to his ultimate coming at the last great day, the general resurrection of just and unjust; and he says, "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" How analogous then, are the two periods. I am aware there are other periods strongly analogous too; those I may notice hereafter, when I shall speak of the Lord's taking care of his few. Thus, then, at the end of that dispensation profession was universal, and apostacy commensurate with that universality of profession; vital godliness was unknown. One of the most popular men of the day, who seems to have had a good natural temperament, at any rate, over which Satan does not seem to have acquired so much power as over the mass in general, he went secretly to Jesus, saying

to himself, There is something, after all, in this teacher that is very strange; he differs from everybody, and everybody differs from him; there is something about this teaching I can't get over. It is a strange thing he should be so out of fashion, and out of order, and out of custom, and out of the good graces of all the people. There is a secret which, perhaps, he will not publicly tell; I will see him secretly. "Master, we know," don't like publicly to confess this, "that you are a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Astounding! whatever can this mean? I have been born once; is not another birth impossible? "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Ah! said this master in Israel, "how can these things be?" Can't understand it. Vital godliness, then, was a thing quite unknown. Such was their state. And so, at the last great day, "when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith in the earth?" But more upon that when I come to the last part of our subject, which will not be this morning. That is one analogy, then, the universal decline of vital godliness, at the end of the Jewish dispensation, is a picture of that universal decline of vital godliness which there will be at the end of this dispensation. The enemy shall then again deceive the nations up to this climax.

The second analogy is that Satan met with such a defeat then that he never met with before. How Satan was overthrown! He gained his end so far. "Hitherto shall you come, but no farther." The seal is broken, the stone is rolled away, the keepers become as dead men. Is it possible he is risen from the dead? Yes. Why, then I am beaten. Has he atoned for sin? Yes. And put their sin away? Yes. And brought in everlasting righteousness? Yes. And swallowed up death in victory? Yes. Then what will become of me? You, why, you shall be cast into the abyss, as this chapter has it, of the world; you shall be cast down to the earth; you shall be limited, and bound, and a seal of infamy shall be set upon you. Doctrines of hostility to God's truth, whether in the pulpit, or in the pew, or anywhere else, I regard every false doctrine as a symbol of the presence of the devil. If I hear a man preach hostile to God's truth, I say to myself, The devil is that man's teacher; that man is doing the devil's work in God's name, in Christ's name; he is telling lies in the name of the Lord; that is what he is doing. Here, then, Satan was conquered. Ah! says Satan, now I am beaten; it is no use for me to lay their sins before God, for they are atoned for; it is no use for me to accuse them before God of their faults, for God has forgiven them all; it is no use for me to accuse them before God of unrighteousness, for God has justified them, made them all righteous; it is no use for me to point out their great spots, or little spots, red spots, or black spots, or any spots, for God has declared there is no spot in them. It is no use for me to try to call God's attention to their unworthiness, or anything bad about them, for since this Messiah has achieved this wondrous victory, God will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. Here, then, Satan met his overthrow, limited; and he has never reached, in the church of God, such a climax as he did in that day. I admit that Satan made great strides through the dark ages, but those that are at all familiar, yes, that have but a slight knowledge of Church history, will see that with all the ground that Satan gained, he has never, since the commencement of the gospel dispensation, gained such ground as he had gained by the time the Savior came. He might well boast, and say to Christ, "All this power will I give you, and the glory of them" these kingdoms, this land of Israel, "for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will give it. If you, therefore, will worship me, all shall be yours." Why, Satan offered his vast and ample dominion to Christ, on the condition that Christ should become of his religion and should worship him; but Satan was then beaten, and he has never regained that possession since. But he has always had his thousands on earth since; he has

now, and he will have to the end; and towards the end he shall stride on with tremendous force. Then shall he marshal his enormous power; and what bloodshed there will be, is not for me to say; what sufferings the saints will then undergo, is not for me to say; perhaps none at all; but, at any rate, then will be Satan's last, and universal, and tremendous attempt; for he marshals Gog and Magog, that are in the four quarters of the earth; he brings all the world to bear against the promised land, to bear against the little camp of the saints, and the beloved city. But as Satan was defeated in the first, he shall be defeated in the last; for fire shall come down from heaven, the judgment of God shall meet him, and he shall be cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

These are two analogies, then; first, that the church, the professing church, was in a universal state of apostacy. So, at the end of this dispensation, when the Son of man comes, he will scarcely find faith on the earth. His people will not be numerous enough to form grains of salt enough to make it worth the Lord's while to preserve the earth any longer. They are the salt of the earth; and the few grains that shall be then left, shall be gathered up, and the earth, and the heavens, and the sea, shall fly from their very existence before the presence of the infinite majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, then, let me take you to the third analogy, that while Satan carried on his deception to such an extent as to fit the adversaries for anything, that for which heathen nations were not fitted, heathen nations would not have treated the Savior as the Jews did. I have the Savior's own authority for this; and even in his day Gentiles bowed before him, even in the very presence of Jews that were despising him. Ah! a false doctrine is one of the most hardening things in the world, because, when a man gets hold of a false doctrine, he makes sure he is right; whereas, when a man makes no profession, he says, Well, I am sure I am not right. I don't know how far I may be wrong, But I don't profess to be right. What made Saul of Tarsus so embittered against Christ? It was the false doctrines that he held. He was zealous in them and was determined to annihilate the Christian religion if possible; but God had thoughts of mercy, and not of judgment towards him. Well, now, the Lord had but few at first, when he came. He took great care of them, and he always has. When the world was drowned, the fewness of his people did not hinder his care. Shall I take all this trouble to have an ark just for this Noah and his family, only eight? Yes, yes. The fewness did not lessen his care. The cities of the plain are to be destroyed; shall I make it worth my while to go and bring Lot out? Yes. He will take care of his own. The house of Jeroboam is to be destroyed; but then in Abijah, that little child, there is some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, and he alone of all the house of Jeroboam shall come to the grave. The Lord will take care of his own. And so, in the days of Elijah; Elijah thought he was left alone, but the Lord said, "I have left me seven thousand." The population of the Jewish commonwealth at that time is reckoned at six million. Well, now, what is seven thousand out of six million? Seven thousand saved, and six millions lost. And then, if you take the population of the globe at that time to be seven, eight, nine, or perhaps ten hundred million, what would seven thousand be out of ten hundred million? Seven thousand saved; ten hundred millions lost. So, in the Savior's day, a few thousands of Jews taken out by the grace of God from the impending judgments, while nearly two million by the Roman arms were destroyed or sent into captivity. So, the fewness did not hinder the Lord's care of his own.