

NOTHING TO BE SORRY FOR

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning April 16th, 1865

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At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 7 Number 332

“Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10

IN consequence of the fall of man the wrath of God lies at the root of our mortal existence; and when the conviction enters into the mind of a sinner that this mortal life and death are only the beginning of wrath, only the beginning of the curse, when a sinner is thus dealt with by the Spirit of God he begins to understand and feel the solemnity of his position. And how is such an one then delighted to know that there are two voices in the Bible, the voice of the law and the voice of the gospel, and that the voice of the gospel is to supersede and succeed the voice of the law! Our text, therefore, taken spiritually, which of course we shall do, is the voice of the gospel, of that gospel that supersedes and succeeds, and that to all eternity, the law of the blessed God.

Now our text lies before us in two parts. Here is, first, *the end of sorrow*, “Neither be you sorry.” Here is, secondly, *the strength of the people*, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

First, then, we notice *the end of sorrow*. And before I enter upon the subject I will here give, as clearly and briefly as I can, a definition of the point or part that I wish this morning to work out and to make plain to you. And the matter stands in this way, that we are assured by the word of God that “sorrow and sighing shall flee away;” that there is not one thing, that there never was one thing, and that there never will be, that has or could, or can occur in the experience or life of a saved soul, for which that man, when he gets to heaven, shall be able to be sorry. Those things that distressed and grieved him here will, when he looks back upon them from heaven, appear as gilded with the rays of God's mercy, infinite skill, and management. So that the saints in glory will not be able to be sorry for anything, because that which the Lord has set over against their sins and sorrows is more powerful to make them glad than sin and death and other circumstances are to make them sorry. Now let me just say, then, before we enter into the various parts of this subject, that the Lord does sometimes give unto his people in this world, to some of his people at least, not all; he does not take all his disciples up into the Mount of Transfiguration; it is not every one that sees God face to face while here, as did Moses; it is not every one that is favored so to enter into the raptures of Calvary's triumphs as was Isaiah; it is not the lot of every one to enter into the stability of the covenant and the joy of it as Jeremiah did; yet there are some of the people of God

at times so favored that there is not a single thing that they shall be sorry for. Whatever has occurred, God has put it right, it is right, it has come right, and shall be right, and not a single thing shall they be sorry for. But I shall be more careful to branch out upon this when I come to that part, if time permit. Let us look, then, in the first place, at that voice of the gospel that supersedes and succeeds the voice of the law. After I have just said (and it is an important matter for you to understand) that in any part of the word of God, whether it be the Old Testament whether it be the New Testament, whether it be in the Evangelists whether it be in the Epistles, or whether it be in the book of the Revelation; let it be in what part it may wherever the sins of men are spoken of to reproach them, and to threaten the penalties due to them, all such parts of scripture are the voice of the law, and you must take them as such. They may be found in juxtaposition with parts that are gospel parts, and interspersed, for reasons which might easily be shown, in many parts of the Bible, with the gospel; a threatening will frequently follow a promise and *vice versa*. Still, at the same time, all those scriptures, wherever the law denounces sin and the sinner, all those scriptures are the voice of the law, let them be found where they may. On the other hand, when the gospel names sin, it is not to condemn the man, but simply to convince the man, and to show him at the same time how freely, and how fully, and how entirely, and how, finally, all this is put away; and that the gospel does in substance say unto him, "Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Let us then, occupy our little time this morning, for that, I dare to say will occupy most of our time, in tracing out the demonstrations of the truth, especially of the first part of our text, and, indeed, of the close of the text. Let us first look at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a wonderfully demonstrative circumstance; for I am not assuming any too much, no, I am not assuming at all, when I say that Jesus Christ was under the law of God not for himself; he was not under the law of God for himself; he was under that law to render to that law obedience not for himself, but for every man that should be brought to see his need of it, and to believe it, and to receive it. He was made of a woman, made under the law; he met the law, and magnified the law. And I say it with reverence, but at the same time with truth, that if the Lord Jesus Christ had not so magnified and fulfilled the law as to have brought in an infallible righteousness, an everlasting righteousness, a righteousness that brings those that are the subjects of it to everlasting glory; if he had not done this he could not have risen from the dead, for he could rise from the dead only on the ground of the perfection of his work; yes, I might even go farther than this: his sacrifice could not have been accepted if he had not have magnified perceptively God's law, and thus have brought in everlasting righteousness. Just so in his atoning death. We see in his atoning death that he was cut off not for himself, but he was cut off for the people; and we see what he has done by his atoning death, that he has, for I may just quote the words as I go along towards the subject, finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, brought in everlasting righteousness. Now, then, let us look at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, as illustrative of the first clause of our text, "Neither be you sorry." We read that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the sepulcher." They sought the Savior, and they sought him sorrowing. Their understandings were not as yet very clear; they thought they had been deceived; they felt they had lost their all: they therefore sought him sorrowing. What was the answer of the angel? "Fear not you, for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified; he is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there shall you see him; lo, I have told you." You go and tell his disciples, and let them go into Galilee, and

if my words do not come true, then do not believe me. The angle lays emphasis upon "Lo, I have told you." And when the disciples went to Galilee, Jesus appeared unto them, and they worshipped him, but some doubted whether it was real. And Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven." Now that we can understand; that is a matter very plain and simple, that there is nothing in heaven against the Lord Jesus Christ; that all the perfections of God are on his side, his work answering to all the demands of those perfections, and to the counsel of the blessed God. "And", he says, also, "in earth." Then if you ask what there is on earth, the answer is, there are many powers upon earth against the souls of the people; but all power is given unto the Lord Jesus Christ: that is to say, his atonement prevails over our sins, his atonement prevails over our circumstances, his atonement prevails over death, his atonement prevails over error, his atonement prevails over hell, his atonement, in a word, prevails over everything. So that as the Savior had ended those sorrows which he took upon him, for he carried our sorrows, he has hereby ended our sorrows; and so, he said, therefore, "Go and teach all nations." Some of the learned tell us that ought to read, "Go and make disciples of all nations." Very well, I have no particular objection to that reading; you may read it in that way if you please. "Go and make disciples of all nations," because we should then have to go to the Acts of the Apostles, and to the Epistles, and see in what way the apostles made disciples; and when we come to the day of Pentecost we shall see that they made disciples by the power of the Holy Ghost; the Holy Ghost convincing sinners of what they were, and bringing them to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. We find in the Acts that the apostle preached at Ephesus, and if we come to his Epistle to the Ephesians, we shall see how he made disciples: "You has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins." "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Now the Savior brings in the Father and the Holy Spirit to show the completeness of his work; that his work was completed to the satisfaction of God the Father, that his work was completed to the satisfaction of the Holy Ghost. To the satisfaction of God, the Father, because it magnified the law, and because it met all the counsels of the covenant; and to the satisfaction of the Holy Ghost, because it met all the predictions which the Holy Ghost put upon record. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." And you will find, in all his interviews with his disciples, that what he said seems to carry out the language of our text, "Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." And when the Lord is pleased thus to appear, it is impossible to be sorry.

But let us look at this matter under some other circumstances connected with what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. And here I may use some rather strong language, namely, that such is the gospel, when the Lord brings it home with power, and brings us into that completeness that is in Christ, and into the certainty of eternal life and of eternal glory, that there will not be left a single thing to be sorry for. Not one of the faults of the Old Testament saints, some of them very bad indeed, not for one of those faults will they be sorry. And even now while in this world, when brought into the realization of what Jesus Christ has done, they do bear testimony and know that there is more power in his atonement to make them glad than there is in their past life to make them sorry; there is more power in Christ's righteousness to lift them into the light of God's countenance, and to fill them with joy, than there is in sin and circumstances to make them sorry; there is more power in the love and presence of God to make them rejoice than there is in all their sins and circumstances put together to make them uncomfortable. I believe, if you had gone to David, I am using strong language, but we must use strong language; Satan is strong, and sin is strong, and circumstances are strong, and we want something stronger than all, and if the gospel of Christ be the power of

God unto salvation to everyone that believes, then we cannot use language too strong; I believe if you could have seen David in his dying hour, and have run over some of the worst parts of his life, and said to him, Are you not sorry for so-and-so? are you not sorry for so-and-so? he would have said, No, I am not sorry, I am not sorry. Why not? Because Jesus Christ has swallowed the whole up and I find more power in the everlasting covenant, the blood of the everlasting covenant, to make me glad, than there is in all these things to make me sorry. And I believe he had no more grief in his dying hour than as though not a single thing had ever overtaken him in his life. I know this does not answer to the twaddle of the present day. There are some that are supposed to be so spotless, and so clean-footed, and so faultless: No doubt that man will die a very happy death; no doubt that woman will die a very happy death. You generally find these people that are so pure in their own eyes die a very cold and a very miserable death; for they have not been knocked about enough to prize the gospel of God much, or the Christ of God, or the grace of God, or the covenant of God; so they live in a pious, easy, quiet, smooth sort of way, and they die much the same as they live, and heaven knows where they go to, I do not. But when David came to die, he knew where he was: "He has made with me" there is my house crooked, and I am not sorry for it; it is just as God permits it to be, just as God foresaw it would be. And if Job had held out, if the Lord had stayed with him in the manifestation of his power; the Lord withdrew that strength. Now, Job, are you not sorry you have lost your property? No. Well, you have lost your children. I am not sorry. Are you not sorry that you are afflicted as you are? No; "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But, say you, he was sorry afterwards. Ah, that was when the season was gone by; that was when the gospel ceased to say with power, "Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Oh, we are very fond of measuring out so many cups of sorrow for each other; very fond of measuring out so many repentances, and so many penances for each other. Why, there is as much Popery, only in a milder form, in a more unceremonious form, among Protestants as there is among Roman Catholics, pretty well. It is almost dangerous in our day to stand upon the completeness that is in Christ, to stand upon the immutability of the blessed God, and to look back over your life, and say, Well, there are many things that have rent my heart in twain, but my comfort is that God is right, Christ is right, grace is right, and therefore I am right, and the devil is wrong. "Neither be you sorry." Let the trouble or the circumstance be whatever it may, it is all perfectly right. In this sense the words of Pope shall come true,

"Whatever is, is right,"

under God's management. I am not a fatalist, but what I am now saying is the spirit of the gospel. "Neither be you sorry." Why, can you have a more pleasing or a more delightful aspect of the gospel than this? Am I not in perfect order? What said the Savior? He said, "I will see you again." "I will." Why, if he will, who can hinder him? Sin hinder him? He has dashed that to atoms. The devil hinder him? He has bruised his head. Death hinder him? He has swallowed it up in victory. Darkness hinder him? your unworthiness hinder him? your hardness hinder him? No. Contemptible story of men-made parsons that Jesus Christ stands shivering at the door, and would like to come in, only the creature won't let him. What does the gospel say about this? Then were the disciples locked up, and shut up, and secure up by reason of the Jews; and did Jesus come and stand shivering side, and the disciples would not let him in? He did not ask them to let him in; stood in the midst of them; and how he got in they did not know; and I do not suppose they cared much, so that he was there, that was all. And he said, "Peace be unto you! I will see you again, and

your heart shall rejoice.” Well but, say you, you do not know what trouble I have got. Well, you will get rid of it by-and-bye, you will not be sorry for it by-and-bye. Ah, I shall always be sorry for so-and-so. No, you will not; he said, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.” Such is the voice of the gospel. “Neither be you sorry.” nothing to be sorry for. It is a great mystery, I grant, and something that faith itself seems hardly able to grasp, because where we have one thing that we seem glad of, we have a thousand to grieve and distress us. And yet it is written upon everything that befalls us in life, “Neither be you sorry;” it is written upon death itself, “Neither be you sorry;” whatever it is, does not matter what. “Neither be you sorry.” To live is gain, to lose is gain, to be hindered is to be helped; to be cursed by men is to be blessed by God, and to die is gain, and all things work for good to them that love him, and are called according to his purpose, “Neither be you sorry.” So, then this voice of the gospel comes not only to save us, but to govern us, and to make crooked things straight, let them be as crooked as they may.

We see this voice of the gospel exemplified not only directly, by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and by what he has done, but we see it in several circumstances, some of which I will now name. There were brethren who hated Joseph for his dreams, and you know what their treatment of him was. By-and-bye, and Joseph in this is, no doubt, that fruitful bough by the well whose branches run over the wall, no doubt a type of our elder brother, Christ Jesus the Lord, by-and-bye, when he made himself known to his brethren, they might well be troubled at his presence. Now what did he say? He preached a doctrine which the pious hypocrisy of the present day would denounce as Antinomianism, “Be not grieved,” What, look back at our murderous conduct towards our brother and not be grieved? No. “Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves.” What, not angry? No, let it drop; drop the subject; “nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here; for God did send me before you to preserve life.” It seems to insinuate, though I do not want to spoil the subject by throwing in any insinuations, but it seems to say this; the difference between us is just thus, you would have killed me, but you could not; and I could kill you, but I will not; you would if you could, and I will not now I can. If you had as much power to kill me as I have to kill you, you would have done it; I have the power, and I will not do it; “for God did send me before you to preserve life.” So, Joseph recognized the hand of God in it, to save much people alive. And seventeen years after this, after Joseph had assured them how he recognized the hand of the Lord; after he had brought them near to him, and assured them that they should dwell near to him, that he would give them the good of the land, and that they should eat the fat of the land, and that every care should be taken of them; ah, said one of the brethren, all this is because our father is living; Joseph always loved his father, and you may depend upon it, when our father dies it will be a bad day for us. And so, seventeen years after that, the father did die, and Joseph's brethren were then uneasy; they seemed to have forgotten the Lord. Just so with us sometimes; some of us have lost friends that were very dear to us, that we highly esteemed, from whom we have received every kindness; and we look around and ask, Have we a friend left like him? and if we do see we have a few left like him, we take a little encouragement from that. So, Joseph's brethren deeply felt this, the loss of their father. And so, you young people who have parents, prize them while they live; you cannot do them any good when they are dead. Honor them while they live, do all the good you can to them while they live; for when you lose your parents, you will never meet with such friends again as long as you live. Parent's advice is always disinterested, always sincere, parents always carry a mantle of love and kindness to throw over the faults of their children, and as long as there is an excellency left, they lay hold of that excellency, and present their children by that excellency. Many parents have done that until they have coaxed their children along, and along, and along,

until some of the most wayward have become the most amiable, the most admirable, the most obedient, the most affectionate, and most loving. Ah, rendering good for evil is like heaping coals of fire upon the head. When the smith has a hard piece of iron, he puts it into the forge, heaps some coals upon it, blows the fire, makes the iron red-hot, and then he can put it into any shape he pleases. And so, it is that these brethren of Joseph, who had cared nothing for their father, felt a change was wrought upon them. They cared nothing for him when they barbarously said when they brought Joseph's coat, "See whether this be your son's coat or no; no doubt Joseph is rent in pieces." They cared not for their father then; but they learnt better before they died. And we bless the Lord where we see such instances of repentance as these; we rejoice at every manifestation of his mercy and kindness in that way. But just notice the language of Joseph; that seems to carry us to the language of our text. And mark the timid, guarded way in which they went to Joseph; they went in their father's name, afraid to go in their own. It is a nice thing to have a good name to go in. We have always a good name to go to our God in; Jesus Christ's name is always good in heaven, always good in the Bible, and always good with the saints; therefore, Jesus says "Come in my name." And so, when their father was dead, Joseph's brethren came to him and said, "Your father did command before he died, saying. So, shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive" now just observe before I touch upon that, when the father was dead, the brethren met together, What shall we do? "Well," said one, "peradventure Joseph will hate us." Another said, "But that is not the worst of it; he will certainly requite us all the evil that we did." No, he will not; now try him. Just so some of you; you sometimes, because you cannot get on in the things of God as you wish, you think all is against you, that he is going to bring all your sins against you. He will not bring any of them. He will bring all your adversaries. If he does it will only be as he brought Pharaoh, to overturn them, and give you deliverance. He will bring all my faults. If he does, it is only to show that they are forgiven and forgotten, and cast into the depths of the sea. And they were afraid to go to Joseph; got somebody else to pray for them, and very right too. We should pray for one another; it's right we should do so. I always feel, if any one says, "I feel I have no power to pray to God, I want you to pray for me," I feel it a great privilege when I can do so. The messenger came, and took the carefully worded message. "Our father commanded us" go in his name, a very good name to go in, because Joseph has nothing against his father; if we go in a name, he has nothing against, but something for, we shall perhaps prevail. "Forgive now your brethren", we are your brethren, we love you now, Joseph; we used to hate you, now we love you, "their trespass and their sin." And they then step a little farther, very cautiously: "And now, we pray you, forgive the trespass" not only of your brethren, not only are we your brethren, but "of the servants of the God of your father." This; was too much for Joseph. For them to suppose that after seventeen years ago kindly receiving them, kindly forgiving them, his heart yearning over them, receiving them with all the welcome possible, and choosing for them the best part of the land, and taking the care he had, oh, for you to think that I should rip open those old sores again, for you to suppose that I should think of it for a moment, when I look at all the goodness and all the mercy of God manifested to me. I have mercy enough for myself, and therefore, can minister mercy to cover all your faults. "And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him." Ah, there is nothing touches. I was going to say, the Savior closer now than our disputing with him as to whether he really will forgive, as to whether he really has forgiven. If anything can, I was going to say, touch the Savior's heart in a way of grief, I think I have done it a great many times, when he told me with almighty power, and brought into my soul the life and spirit of it, "with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer." Why, he said, I am the representative of the great God; I am commissioned from God to do you all the good I can, but not to do you any harm. I am in the place of God; that

is, the representative of God. God has commissioned me not to destroy, but to save; God has commissioned me not to starve people, but to feed them; God has commissioned me not to be unkind, but to be kind to you. I am in the place of God. But since you have named the subject, I may just suggest to you that you meant evil against me; I might as well say that; won't do you any harm. Now that was very mild; don't you think it was? I think so. "You thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. And he comforted them, and spoke kindly unto them." And Joseph lived fifty years after this; and how was he at the end of the fifty years? That is a long time for a friend to stick to you. Now Jesus Christ is that Friend that sticks closer than a brother; Jesus Christ never turns away old friends, or new ones either, providing they are real ones. Joseph lived fifty years after the death of his father, rather more than fifty; and when he was about to die, his brethren were there, most, I suppose all of them alive at that time. And what will Joseph say now? I wonder if Joseph has changed his religion? No. "I die." Ah, what will become of us then? "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from hence;" and so they did. Now then, "neither be you sorry." Joseph would not let his brethren be sorry; and so, the Lord by-and-bye will not let his people be sorry. Take another circumstance. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, are you not very sorry you have got into that furnace? No; never happier in our lives. Why, Daniel, you have been accustomed to be in the king's palace as one of the councilors and cabinet ministers; I am sure you are gone down low enough, you are in the lions' den now; are you not sorry? No, not at all; very happy; for the Lord has sent his angel, and shut the lions' mouths; and if he keeps them shut, I know they can't open them, quite sure of that. "Neither be you sorry." Again, we see it in a great many other circumstances in this divine book, this voice of the gospel putting an end to our troubles pertaining to essential and to circumstantial; but I must name only one more, because of time, and that is, we see this voice of the gospel in this 10th chapter of Nehemiah. They entered into a covenant, sealed a covenant, under a great curse, to have no god to be their God but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that they would keep the law of faith, and abide by it. And would they be sorry for this? No, this would put an end to their sorrow. There is no regenerated soul will ever come into real happiness until it comes into real decision. And we find the people in this 10th chapter engaging to bring the first-fruits of all their increase; and they concluded this covenant, upon which I must not now enlarge, with that declaration which you will find in the last clause of that chapter, and which I think will be just the language of your hearts. I believe I am speaking to hundreds this morning that can come to the same conclusion, and it is this, "We will not forsake the house of our God." We will forsake the houses of other gods, but we will not forsake the house of our God. So, then, if brought to take our stand upon what Christ has done, if brought into this spirit of real decision, then the text belongs to us; "Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." I may also, before I go to the last clause, just remind you that in this book the adversaries of Israel wrote to the king of Persia, and raked up all the old faults of the Israelites. Well, then, the king said, they are a bad lot, and they must not go on building; they must not be allowed to do so; they are a bad lot. He put a negative upon them; that was very discouraging. Well, by-and-bye the Lord turned around, stepped in, raised up a friend, and he said to the king. These people say, for they appear to me to be a sort of predestination people, these people say that there is a decree that the house is to be built, and that Cyrus was a servant of God, and that that decree is by Cyrus. Now I send to the king to know whether it really is so or not; because if there was a decree it stands in their favor, a royal decree. By-and-bye out comes this decree; away went the devil, and the very people that had

so much to say against the Israelites, racking up their old faults, were obliged to help them, Ah, says the king, if you meddle with them, your house shall be pulled down, made a dunghill, the timber set up, and you shall be hanged thereon. Now of course I don't approve of that; still, it just shows how the Lord can frighten the devil and all his agents when he pleases. Ah, then, be you not sorry; "Neither be you sorry." Well, then, that old Sanballat and Tobiah, they have raked up all our old faults, in order to make us sorry; but in comes the divine decree, buries the whole, puts the whole away, and you are to build the house, and build the walls, and build the city; not by virtue of your goodness or your badness, but by the authority, power, mercy, and goodness of the blessed God. I do glory in having faith in God; no use having faith anywhere else; in him you will find a Friend that never, never fails. Now you will not misunderstand me; it is, very rarely that even the favored child of God gets into such a state of mind as to be perfectly reconciled, and to say, I shall not mourn over anything; all the grief is gone; all is settled, all is well. God keep me standing firm, and when I can rejoice, I will rejoice. And so, they kept the pass-over seven days with great joy, for the Lord made them joyful, and in his providence turned the heart of the king of Syria towards them, to strengthen them in the work of the house of the Lord. Here is his providence. And so now, in our position in completing our beautiful chapel, the Lord alone can enable us to do so. We feel our need of his providence, we feel our need of his grace; and we do know, and we shall have plenty with us to acknowledge that, we do know that if the house be built it will be by the goodness of the Lord, and not by the goodness of the creature; though we feel highly honored in being servants to work in the Lord's house, to forward his cause, extend his truth, and seek the vital, the present, the social, the moral, the spiritual, above all, the eternal good of our fellow creatures. And I am sure in this undertaking, and in this service, we shall never repent thereof. "Neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Thus, then, there is everything in the gospel to encourage us. If the voice, of the law alarm you, flee from it in solemn awe to that voice which said, "Look unto me," in the gospel, "and be you saved; I am God, and there, is none else."

The joy of the Lord, of course, means two things; first, the joy which he imparts; and, secondly, the delight he has in the welfare of the people. But I will sum up with just a word or two. The finished work of Jesus Christ is the joy of the Lord, and that is our strength. The sworn covenant of the blessed God is the joy of the Lord, and that is our strength. God's presence with his people is his joy also: he delights to dwell with the sons of men in the earth, and will do so till he has wiped away all tears from off all faces, and that is our joy and our strength. One more point, and that is, God's infallible faithfulness. Ah, how he does delight in his eternal sameness!