

NEVER DESPAIR

A SERMON

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“And prevailed not.” Revelation 12:8

IT is a mercy for us that the adversary, and all the tribulations of the people of God, and all their enemies, and all that would hinder them, are under the statutes of limitation. “Hitherto shall you come, but no further.” The adversary goes about seeking whom he may devour. We may therefore thus trust in the Lord our God under all the circumstances of this trying life. It is for us difficult to enter very deeply into the reasons why Satan is so, shall I say, infinitely enraged against God in the gospel; but I suppose that the chief reason is because he himself is forever cast out, and being under almighty wrath, that wrath produces wrath. He detests nothing so much as he does God in the gospel, because hereby Satan himself is overcome, hereby his kingdom is torn to pieces, and hereby those whom he has led captive at his will are brought to tread him under their feet, to defy his mightiest power; and each, as he steps on his pilgrimage, and as he walks through the valley of Jordan, and as he shall rise from the dead at the last great day, and take possession of his eternal inheritance, each, through the name of the Lord, the mercy of the Lord, and that power of God by which they have been kept, each shall say, “O my soul, you have trodden down strength.”

I will now come, then, to notice the import of our text. I will first point out *that which the enemy is represented in this chapter as opposing, and in which it is written, “He prevailed not;”* and then, secondly, as far as time permits, *some of the advantages we have in this defeat of the enemy of our souls.*

I notice then, first, *that which the enemy is here represented as opposing, and in which he prevailed not.* And in noticing the circumstances under which the church thus appears I will, out of the many things that may be mentioned, name three things which Satan is here represented as opposing, but in which it is written that he prevailed not. First, he aimed to devour the man-child that the woman was to bring forth. Second, he aimed to starve the church. Third, he aimed to stop, to put an end to, the public ministry of the word. These are not all, they are only a sample of the things to which he here stood maliciously opposed, and in which our text says he prevailed not. I notice then, first, that he aimed to devour the man child that the woman was to bring forth. Before I enter upon that I may just observe that it is clear to us all that Satan never did even in the literal history of the

Savior get one advantage over him. He from time to time hoped he should, but notwithstanding all that Satan did, the Savior was, when he came to the cross, the spotless Lamb; and after he had gone through what none but such a person could go through, in the death that he died, it is emphatically said, "You will not suffer your Holy One to see corruption." Perhaps that was said for this very purpose, to show that Satan would aim to defile him; because if he could have defiled him he would have devoured him; if he could have got the Savior to have sinned, he would thereby have devoured him in the perfection of his person and of his work; and so, if he could thus have dealt with the last Adam as he dealt with the first, then for sinners there would be no hope. But to show that he prevailed not, it says in relation to the Savior in the grave, "You will not suffer your Holy One to see corruption." Now what is said of him when he was to be born? "That holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." And after the life he lived, and after the wonderful death he died, in which all our sins were laid upon him, and put eternally away, in which he swallowed up death in victory, what is said of him in the grave? "The Holy One;" "You will not suffer your Holy One to see corruption." How our hearts at times rejoice in seeing the dear Savior thus walk in the territories of Satan, encounter all the powers of darkness, and come off so gloriously at the last as thus to accomplish the warfare, and secure to every poor sinner that feels his need of such an interposing Savior that victory spoken of so beautifully by the apostle when he says, "Thanks be unto God, that gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ"! But then this is not the form in which the Savior is here presented. Now this chapter must be understood not literally at all, but in the spiritual and the Christian sense; and it commences like several other chapters in the book of Revelation, for it is a book of great repetition, giving us not successive ages, but successive representations of the same things. So here, in the beginning of the gospel dispensation, the church is spoken of as a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, which I need not touch upon as to the meaning thereof. Now, then, it is said she was with child, cried out to be delivered. This must be understood in the spiritual sense of the word, just the same as those words in the 4th of Galatians: when the Galatians seemed inclined to glide off from God's gospel into another gospel, the apostle says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." You will therefore observe that if we take this spiritually the meaning was that the church of the blessed God was laboring to bring forth Christ from time to time as the Alpha and the Omega, was laboring to bring forth Christ as the end of the law, as the end of sin, in a word, laboring to bring forth Christ as the Surety of the everlasting covenant. Now, then, Satan stood before the church and tried to hinder the church from doing this; for all ministers and churches where the Savior is thus brought forth, Satan must of necessity retire, he must of necessity be defeated, he cannot stand in the presence of the mighty Conqueror, Christ Jesus the Lord. Let us see now how beautifully this is represented in the Old Testament, to encourage us to serve the Lord our God with increasing interest and increasing advantage. Now Micah foresaw that this would just be the state of the church in the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and of course, more or less, according to the times in which the church lived, down to the end of time. Micah gives a beautiful representation; let us have his representation in order to show how safe the people of God are with the Lord on their side. He commences with contemplating and congratulating the church upon the blessedness of her position. "You, O tower of the flock", that, of course, is Christ Jesus; there poor sinners find refuge, there they have strong confidence, "you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto you shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." Here, then, is a declaration that all those that believe, the first the pre-eminent dominion shall come to them, the kingdom shall come to them. Now comes the tribulation

of this people. "Now why do you cry out aloud? is there no king in you?" Yes, there is a king, and yet the people, not feeling that confidence and safety they could wish, are alarmed, terrified. "Is your counsellor perished?" No, he is not perished. "For pangs have taken you as a woman in travail." And the Lord says, "Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now, shall you go forth out of the city." We must have here a little something historical. They were to go out of the city of Jerusalem, "Now shall you go forth out of the city, and you shall dwell in the field", that is; the Gentile world, "and you shall go even to Babylon" of course, mystic Babylon, the Gentile world. And so the apostles did, and so the glorious gospel of the blessed God thus came out into the wide field of the world; "Preach the gospel unto every creature." "There shall you be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem you from the hand of your enemies." Now, then, reduce this to personal experience: the Lord is pleased to lead his people about in a variety of ways, in a way that they would not in many respects go; and what is it all for? Why, that he might more conspicuously display the riches of his grace. This was the reason of Paul's thorn in the flesh, that the Lord might more conspicuously display his power. He thus teaches us to humble us, to know what is in our hearts, whether we will keep his truth or no. And then in the beginning of the gospel dispensation, when the church was thus formed, when Christ was thus all in all, when Christ became the great center, the meeting-place of God and man, then they were in tribulation; something we are not much used to in the sense in which I mean it here. We may be subjected, perhaps, to a little individual insult, but we are not used to that public reproach, reviling, and slander, which the church underwent at that time and in after ages. "Now also many nations are gathered against you, that say, Let her be defiled;" that is, manufacture the worst of names, and call her by those names; manufacture the worst of crimes, and call her, and nominate her, and look at her through those crimes. That is the way the church was then dealt with. "Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." All this is the work of Satan, to try, shall I say, to move the people away from the truth, to move them away from Jesus Christ. But these adversaries, Satan and his agents, so employed, "know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel; for he shall gather them", and if he gathers them, who can scatter them? "he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor." And then the church is commanded to do what in that age she did do; "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass: and you shall beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord," in sweet accordance with that scripture in the 41st of Isaiah, "Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says the Lord, and your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff. You shall fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them." Thus, then, the adversary, by all the steps he took to devour the gospel, to devour the man child mystically, the Lord overruled it to make Jesus Christ the more desirable and the more precious. And just so you will find that all experiences of tribulation will have a tendency not to devour Jesus Christ, but to bring in more and more of Jesus Christ. Those of us that do know something of him as the Substitute, as the Surety of the covenant, as the all and in all, and something of him in those relations we presently have to notice, we should not know even half what we do but for those tribulation experiences by which we are made to cry to God for mercy, and strength, and grace, and wisdom; and we are led hereby more deeply to appreciate the promises of his word, the provisions of his house, and his lovingkindness and wondrous friendship towards us.

Now it is said of this child that he “was caught up unto God, and to his throne.” That of course must be understood mystically, the providential care of the Lord. Just take this view of it; I am sure it is true, taken in the mystic and figurative sense; look at the preservation of the Bible, the oldest book in the world, wonderful. In ancient times what libraries there were! full of learned works; very learned works no doubt they were, if we may judge by the little fragments, we have of some of the writings of the ancients. Those great libraries are gone, burnt, or otherwise destroyed. But the Bible has been preserved; the Bible remains. Oh, if the adversary could but have devoured the Bible! Not that if one book had been burnt the Lord could not have caused another to be written; I am quite aware of that; but still it is well to observe the care that the Lord has taken of the Holy Scriptures, so that they are come down to us unmutated; they are come down to us in their completeness; we have them from the first of Genesis to the last of the Revelation. Thus, it may be said, then, that the adversary in all ages has tried to get rid of Jesus Christ; but he prevailed not; there has been a people in all ages that has held fast the truth as it is in Jesus. "We may in this part of our subject bless the Lord that with all the trials and all the circumstances of which we may have been the subjects, we have not got tired of Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ is not lessened, but rather increased, and that he is not lowered, but heightened, and that he is not rendered less important, but more so than before, and more and more do we learn that everything is in and by Christ Jesus the Lord. We know not the worth, and never shall till we get home to glory, of that form of speech which we often meet with in the Scriptures. Perhaps of all the forms of speech in the Scriptures there is none better, or more significant, or more advantageous than that one, namely, “In the Lord;” to dwell in the Lord, to boast in the Lord, to be complete in the Lord, approved in the Lord, accepted in the Lord; all standing there. So that true religion brings us out of self, out of the first Adam, out of the law, out of sin, out of death, out of trouble, simply into this sweet oneness with him who has gained the victory, and will cause us to rejoice therein.

The next thing we see the adversary aiming at here is to starve the church. “To the woman”, that is, the church, “were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time”, as long as she is to be there. Here, then, though it is a wilderness world, the adversary is limited as well. Hence under the black horse, which I am inclined to think symbolizes a false religion, the object of which seemed to be to take away the truth, to take away the sustenance, the support, or that which supports the people of God, there came a voice from the midst of the four living creatures, that is, from the mercy-seat, from the tabernacle, saying, “A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see you hurt not the oil and the wine;” to show that the Lord would daily sustain his people. The oil I take there to be the grace of God; the wine I take to be the blood of the everlasting covenant. These are all out of the reach of the adversary, so that he can spoil none of these. Here, therefore, the words of our text may well apply, “And he prevailed not.”

And then the next thing that he aimed to devour or to hinder was the public ministry of the word. It is said here that “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels;” and all this is said to take place in heaven; not, of course, the heaven of glory, but the heavenly dispensation of the gospel. And by Michael we are to understand of course the Lord Jesus Christ, whoever did and ever will stand by his people. And the dragon of course we understand to be Satan; and his angels do not mean his ministers merely, but his servants at large, his followers and servants at large. He aimed here to devour or to hinder the public ministry of the word; but as I said just now, Satan is under statutes of limitation, “Hitherto shall you come, but no further.” It

is proper for us to be cautious, and to be wary, and to be vigilant, and not to be high-minded, knowing that we stand by faith, and if the Lord does not keep that faith up, and keep us holding fast his truth, like others we should give way. But still, if the Christian looks at his standing, see how firm it is, those who are thus brought to make Jesus Christ their all in all, those that are brought to see that the Lord will lead them forth by a right way, that he will sustain them in the wilderness, and supply all their needs.

But I will proceed, secondly, to notice *some of the advantages we have in this defeat of the enemy of our souls*, always remembering that his defeat is founded upon Calvary's cross. Before I go on to notice his defeat, I must notice the ground. It was by the fall of man that Satan gained ascendancy over us; it was by sin he gained ascendancy over us; in other words, it was by our believing in him. We believed in Satan; Adam and Eve believed in Satan, and that believing in him brought them into subjection to him; on the other hand, believing in the Savior brings us into subjection to him. Now, then, it is by thus believing in Satan's falsehood that we are brought into a disbelief of God's truth, and come under Satan's power. Hereby we have become guilty before God, and hereby God is against us in every one of his perfections. His holiness stands against us, because we are unholy; his righteousness or his justice stands against us, because we are unjust; his power stands against us, because we defy that power; and indeed, all his perfections stand entirely against us. How then is the enemy to be defeated? Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ comes under the law, he takes upon him our sin and guilt, and atones for that sin and puts it away; so that there is not a sin, there is not a fault, left. And if Satan cannot succeed in laying something to your charge before God, he cannot sever you from God; because that that severed you from God Christ has taken away. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, and the work of the devil was to sever us from God, to keep us in that separation, and to fill our minds with darkness and with enmity, until we should lift up our eyes in hell. Now, then, Jesus Christ having destroyed these works of the devil, having put away all that stood against us, we gain the victory by being brought to believe and receive this; because if you lay hold of this that Jesus Christ has done, and take that position, you come under the challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Here it is, then, by precious faith, we receive Jesus Christ as the end of sin, and hereby, by this faith in Jesus Christ, God in all his perfections is on our side. While God is no respecter of persons, he is a respecter of principles, and if you have a grain of faith in your heart, he respects that principle, that principle of faith in your heart stands as an evidence that you are born of him, that you are one of his. No one can fear him, in the gospel sense of the word, that does not believe in him. There must be a believing in him, and receiving his truth, before you can revere his truth; and being brought to believe in his truth, you thereby revere his truth, and stand out for that truth, which is nothing else but working righteousness. Such are accepted with him. Now this is the ground, as this chapter shows, of the adversary's defeat. "This is our victory over the world, even our faith." What will not the Lord do for such a people as this? Oh! there is no sin too great to bring before him; there is no trouble too great to bring before him; there is no burden too heavy to bring before him; there is no cause too intricate to bring before him. We may bring everything before him; casting all our care upon him; because the adversary is so completely defeated that to lay anything to our charge here before God is utterly impossible. I suppose there will be clouds between men, and between many Christians perhaps, even as long as they live; but then there is no cloud between them and the Lord Jesus Christ; here there is a morning without clouds, in consequence of what he has done. Here it is the church is safe in the possession of Christ, because Christ is safe in the possession of the church; here they must be sustained, and here Satan cannot hinder the triumphant progression of the blest

Redeemer; he still goes forth conquering and to conquer. And some of your most painful experiences, why does the Lord subject you to them? I know the reason. I know that all of us would make but very little use of the atonement of Christ before God if God did not so deal with us as to make us feel what poor autumnal leaves, what poor stubble, we are. We should enter very little into the spirit of the psalmist when he said, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of your only," were it not for those painful experiences by which we are humbled before him, and by which we become delighted by the victory that Christ has wrought. Here then is the reason that the adversary cannot prevail. Hence in this same chapter, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Now I will suppose, then, the Lord has so blessed us, brought us into possession of Jesus Christ as the Surety of the covenant, brought us to believe the promise in Christ Jesus that he will sustain us, and will never leave nor forsake us, and brought us to stand against evil, against the dragon and his agents, in decision for God's truth; that whatever would oppose that, opposes us; and whatever touches that, touches the apple of our eye; I will suppose, now, we are brought thus far. What is said of the adversary? Why, it is said that he was cast out, and place was found no more for him. He had a place in the first paradise, to spoil the same; he had a place in the Jewish heavens, to spoil the same; and the Jewish heavens are rolled together as a scroll, the Jewish heavens passed away with a great noise, the Jewish heavens are no more. But here, in the Christian heavens, place is found no more for him. Now let us hear what is said of these people who are thus favored, over whom the adversary cannot fatally prevail. It therefore says that now this victory is brought in, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ." That does not refer to one particular age of the church; understand it thus, friends, that when the gospel is brought in, the gospel of Jesus Christ in the victory he has wrought, and pardoning mercy rolls into your soul, and you have peace with God, you can look back and see your name in life's fair book set down, and look forward and behold eternal joy as your own. It does not refer to any particular age of the church, but to present experience. "Now" that this victory is brought in, and the adversary cast down, "now is come salvation." Now I know that I am a saved man; now salvation is come to my house; now I know the Lord has saved me; for if he had not saved me this mercy would not have rolled into my soul. "And strength." Now I am strong; now the Lord has so strengthened me that I can "Abba, Father," cry. "And the kingdom of our God." Now his kingdom is come. I have been praying his kingdom would come, and his kingdom is come. "And the power of his Christ." And what is the power of his Christ? Why, being a Priest continually, he is able to save unto the uttermost, or forevermore, all that come unto God by him. So, then, this is one thing; we have the presence of our God by his salvation, by his strength, by his kingdom, and by the power of his Christ. Now mark these four. This is one of the happy consequences of Christian standing and Christian experience, that you have the Lord on your side in his salvation, now it is come, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ. This is the happy consequence. And have we not at times realized the same? Have we not been thus favored to feel that we have God with us in his salvation, in his eternal strength, in his kingdom, and in the power of his Christ? And what is the power of his Christ? I have given one sample of it; but the power of his Christ is to make every one of his enemies his footstool; the power of his Christ is to break his enemies to shivers, as a potter's vessel; the power of his Christ is to wash out every stain, justify from all things; and so, the apostle's ambition was, "that the power of Christ may rest upon him." Here, then, is one happy experience following upon the coming in of this victory. And another is that you are to rejoice in the new heavens. "Rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them." Now, in order to understand what is

meant by rejoicing in the heavens, I must go to the second chapter of Ephesians. The heavens there, I apprehend, do not refer to the heavens of eternal glory; I have no objection to apply the words to eternal glory, but I think they have a closer application; they belong to us. Because those who are in heaven possess all there; they do not need the promises of the Bible, they do not need words of consolation there; for they have no tribulation. "Rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them." You must go here, I say, to the 2nd of Ephesians, and there you will get what is meant. "He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The heavens there mean the people inhabiting those heavens; that is, you dwell in God's love; that is a heaven to your soul; and you dwell in his choice, and you dwell in his righteousness, and you dwell in Christ's perfection, and you dwell in the exceeding great and precious promises of his blessed word, and you dwell in his sworn covenant, and you dwell in his presence. "Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them," for your adversary prevails not. He has not been able to move the foundation of your hope, Christ Jesus; he has not been able to starve you; he has not been able to hinder the word from being a blessing to you; and he is conquered, and he has not been able to hinder God from being your salvation and your strength; he has not been able to hinder the coming in of that kingdom that shall break all other kingdoms to pieces, for "his kingdom rules over all;" he has not been able to hinder the power of Christ. "Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them." But "woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time." Now am I speaking this morning to some that do not know the Lord? You have got your reason; let me have just a word with you. The adversary knows that your life is short, and he will try by every means to lead you into error, or profligacy, or something or another, to shorten your life. He longs to get you into hell. He will lead, marshal you against some of the people of God, the cause of God, or something or another by which he can bring you under God's judgment, and get you to hell if he can. He has great wrath. Why, when you that know the Lord were in a state of nature, Satan was angry with you then. Oh, how he would like to have cut you off! how he would like to have destroyed you then! And may we not apply those words which the father used, concerning his son when Satan had got possession of him? "Ofttimes it has cast him into the fire, and into the water, to destroy him; and wheresoever he takes him, he tears him;" and as we read of another that he wandered among the tombs, and that he broke the bands with which he was bound, as young people sometimes do the laws of discipline. Yet Satan, notwithstanding all this, could not devour such; they were preserved: but no thanks to them, nor to Satan either, that their lives were preserved until Christ met with them. "The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath." He showed the Savior all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. He has but a short time, and he has great wrath; he delights in the damnation of the souls of men. "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea!" for they are under the god of this world, the great destroyer, the old serpent, that delights in nothing but in mischief. These same people, while they spiritually and by faith dwell in the heavens, they do personally for the present dwell upon the earth; therefore it is needful that the church should be blessed with wings as of eagles to fly into the wilderness, to be severed from an ungodly and empty professing world, where she is to be nourished. And Satan "went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God;" and the commandments of God may be summed up in these two, both of which are found in the Old Testament, "Hear, O Israel! the Lord your God is one God; and you shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself." These are the two commandments, and by faith in Jesus Christ we are brought to love this covenant God with all our hearts, and brought to love the brethren even as ourselves.

And now, lastly, and what I have to say I desire to say with deep solemnity, and at the same time with pleasure, just as Pharaoh prevailed not against the Israelites, just so shall no internal or external or circumstantial adversary prevail against you. "He prevailed not." And if it were possible to roll all the tribulations of all the people of God in all ages in upon one Christian, and if he had to pass from one to the other, he would find in every case the victory. Just as Pharaoh prevailed not, except to his own destruction, so with your adversaries it must be. Just as Nebuchadnezzar prevailed not with his fiery furnace over the three worthies, just so will the Lord give you the victory. Just as Haman prevailed not to get Mordecai on the gallows that he had erected for him, but came to it himself; just so shall it be with the adversaries of the people of God. Just as Sennacherib against the few people in Jerusalem prevailed not, but himself was blasted, so shall be the adversaries of the saints of the Most High. And just as Herod, though he slew James, the Lord's brother, yet had to die himself a murderer's death, and was eaten of worms before his life left him, so shall be the adversaries of the followers of the Lamb.

Of all these adversaries it may well be said, they prevailed not. Here we have an omnipotent arm interposing. And many, many more instances might I name. Just as Goliath prevailed not, just as king Saul prevailed not over David, and just as Jezebel and Ahab aiming to slay Elijah prevailed not, all these are manifestations of Satan, and our text shows how the Lord puts a negative upon the whole. We often have to say:

"Huge sorrows meet us as we go,
And devils aim our overthrow;
But vile infernals can't prevail,
The Christian's hope shall never fail."

"So let all your enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might."