

A GOOD CONTRAST

A SERMON

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“God also has set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.” Ecclesiastes 7:14

THE former part of this verse was our text last Lord's Day morning, and we noticed the several things which were to be considered in a time of adversity. And that department would have borne much more to be said upon it, because tribulation is that that will attend us more or less as long as we live. We are restless under it, and the Lord intends we shall be, for he has said. “This is not your rest.” Yet it is our comfort to know that the Lord has set the prosperity over against the adversity, “to the end that man should find nothing after him.”

Our text this morning divides itself into two parts. Here is, first, *the contrast*; and secondly, *the purpose*.

First, *the contrast*, the prosperity set over against the adversity. First, in the mediation of the Savior; second, in the work of the Holy Spirit; third, in circumstances; and forth, in final destiny. You will find this to be true in all these departments. And I think we may enter upon the first, the Lord enabling us to do so, if we are in a state of mind at all to appreciate what the Lord has done for us, we may enter upon the first with great pleasure. In the first place, we take the 5th of the Romans, we are there represented as being without strength, and ungodly. There is our spiritual adversity. And it is a great mercy to be brought to feel that we have no strength to meet the law of God, nor even to preach the gospel of God; we are as helpless in the one as we are in the other; for as we are carnal, and the law is spiritual, and we are sold under sin, so without the Savior in gospel matters we can do nothing. Now what is it that God has set over against this our weakness and our ungodly state? This is a subject for faith; it is for us the Lord enabling us, profitably to understand it. “In due time, when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.” His atoning death destroys all our weakness, and brings in that for us described in the 26th of Isaiah, “Trust in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;” or that in the 33rd of Deuteronomy,

“As your days, so shall your strength be.” Here then we have the death of Christ set over against our weakness and our ungodliness. What can we have better? What can we have so suitable? Why, my hearer, it is a self-evident fact, it is an open truth, that our weakness and our ungodliness, which Jesus Christ took upon himself, did not overcome him; in his life and in his death, he overcame the whole, and it is gone forever. So, if we would prosper, and rise above our weakness; if we would be separated from ungodliness, and have a godliness unmixed with ungodliness, it must be by the reception of Jesus Christ in what he has done. This is a happy life to live; and if we can look to the Lord daily in this way, we are sure to succeed and to prosper. But if you set your own doings over against your sins, your sins will care no more for your doings than Satan cared for the sons of Sceva; your sins will care no more for your doings than the rolling waves of the sea cared for the command of king Canute. But when we can plead and set over against our sins the death of Jesus Christ, there we have an all prevailing plea; there we shall not only prosper, but, bless the Lord he has taken a loving, a merciful, a gracious advantage of our weakness and our helplessness, to show the greatness of his grace. Then, again, the apostle represents us not only as without strength and ungodly, but as sinners: “God commends his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners” the apostle does not attribute any other character to us than that of sinners; he does not attribute anything that is good to us. And so, all of you that are taught of God will find that the word “sinner” will sum up the whole of what you are by nature. “There is none righteous, no, not one; none that does good, no, not one.” “But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” “Greater love,” then, “has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” But here God comes in when we are sinners. And what is this for? Why, the Savior explains the great purpose of this when he says, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me;” because we perceive here the love of God, and find it is to sinners; and here we see the love of Christ, and it is to sinners. And if we have precious faith to receive this testimony, then we get rid of the worst of adversity; for the very root of all our adversity is found in what we are as sinners before God. Then the apostle sets the precious blood of Christ over against the wrath to which we are exposed. He says, “Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” Here you see the word “justification,” or the word “justify,” means exemption, “justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” What an atonement that must be! what a Savior that must be! and how true are the words that “the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands”! For it pleased the Lord to send such a Savior in such an order of things, exactly suited unto us. And not only so, but also enemies, “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” Take these five characteristics, and ask whether all our real adversities are not founded in and do not arise from the same. First, without strength; second, ungodly; third, sinners; fourth, children of wrath; and fifth, enemies. There is our character; to get rid of weakness, to get rid of ungodliness, to get rid of sinner-ship, to get rid of wrath, and to get rid of enmity. “and,” as the apostle there comes out beautifully to show, “not only so, but we also joy in God;” the apostle states that as a miracle; he states that as something wonderful; he states that as something overwhelming and astounding. “We joy in God,” which God might have been to eternity a consuming fire, an awful terror, and not our consolation. Yet that same God has found out a way by which our sins should thus be put away wrath be terminated, and the wonderful declaration brought in, “The Lord has sworn,” in and by his dear Son, “that he will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.” “We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Here, again, I must stop for a minute. “By whom” by Jesus Christ, “we have now received the atonement,” that is, by his Spirit. There are thousands that have received his atonement, but not by

his Spirit. They have it, therefore, in profession, but not in possession; and that which they seem to have shall be taken from them ere long. "By whom we have received the atonement." Now if we profess to view this mediation of the Savior as set over against the greatest of all adversities, namely, our guilty and wretched state as sinners, have we received this atonement by the authority of Jesus Christ, by the Spirit and power of Jesus Christ? for "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live." Or have we received it merely by the invitation of man, merely by the fact that we have been thrown into the company of those that profess the same, and we have the same way of talking, and into the same profession? If we have thus received it only by man, then "from him that has shall be taken away even that which he seems to have." I will just mention two or three things here; for we must soon depart, a few years more will lay each of us, especially some of us who are a little advanced in years, on our dying pillow; and therefore, we had better examine ourselves now than be deceived at the last. In the first place, then, if you receive this atonement by Jesus Christ, or by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, you are conscious of your need of just such an atonement; that if there be one sin connected with you in the past, in heart, lip, or life, or if there be a possible sin of the future connected with you, for which his atonement is not an adequate, an equal, all sufficient remedy; if you have received it by the Holy Spirit, you will thus feel that if this be not the character of his atonement, to cover, as Mister Osborne used to say, all the ground, to cleanse from all sin, there is no hope for you. You will have such a clear understanding of what his atonement is in its great variety of adaptability to your state that you will, though perhaps it may seem extravagant language, but we are obliged sometimes to use what may appear extravagant language to convey our meaning, you will view, as it were, one drop of the Savior's blood as of more value than all the beasts on Jewish altars slain. They could not take away sin, but Jesus has taken away sin. And therefore, you will so understand it that it will be precious to you. And if any one were to come to you and say, What would you liken it to? you would say I would liken it to this, that I owe ten thousand pounds; and am to be cast into prison, and never to have liberty or see the light again until I pay this great sum to the very last mite; but I have not enough to pay the first mite, much less the last; therefore there is no hope. But a surety steps in and sets ten million pounds to my account; so that the debt of ten thousand pounds is cleared off, and an ample estate is left; I am set at liberty, and have enough to make me, as it were, a little king as long as I live. So, something like this we may say of the atonement of the dear Savior. He is God; glory in the personal deity of Jesus Christ; glory in his co-equality with the Father and with the eternal Spirit; rejoice that he is Jehovah our righteousness, rejoice in the beautiful words which the apostle addressed to the elders of Ephesus, "Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." Again, if you have received this atonement by Jesus Christ, by his authority, and by his Spirit, I do not know anything that you will so firmly abide by, and so cleave to from time to time, as the sacrificial and eternal perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ. An Israelite would look to the temple, and he would say when the morning came, Whatever be omitted this morning, do not omit to offer the spotless lamb. When the evening came, he would say, whatever be omitted this evening, do not omit to offer the spotless lamb. When the great Day of Atonement came, and there were many things to attend to, the right-minded Israelite would say, Whatever you omit, do not omit those pure offerings by which the high priest can enter into the holy of holies, sprinkle the mercy-seat, come out to us with his face shining from God's presence, and bear testimony unto us that our sins are gone, that wrath is gone, that mercy is come, that grace reigns, that all is well. Here, then, God has set this prosperity of the Savior's mediation over against this adversity of sin, and wrath, and condemnation. Now if we have received it, therefore, by the Spirit of Christ, we shall abide by it. How Abel looked to it! how Enoch walked with God by it! how Noah abode by

it! How Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, trusted in it! And I make no hesitation in saying that if we have seen the day of Christ as Abraham saw it, we shall see that there is no day like it. All other days are cloudy, and uncertain, and pass away, and we know not what other days may bring forth; but we know what this eternal day will bring forth. It has brought forth life and immortality; it has brought forth everything we need for time and for eternity. How firmly did Moses abide by this! And is not that a beautiful and instructive scripture, "To him give *all* the prophets witness"? People may not see this, but God says it is so. And when we read the Old Testament in its own light as pointing to the suffering of Christ and the glory that should follow, we shall see our text here amplified, that he has set the prosperity of the Savior over against our adversity as sinners. Now if we have thus received this atonement by the Spirit of Christ, then we shall know our need of it, we shall understand the nature of that atonement, and we shall abide by it; in a word, we shall be afraid of God anywhere else. Well, now, I believe I have known the Lord for many years, and if it fall to my lot to hear, perhaps, a good man preach in a legal strain, and seem to lose sight of Christ, it is astonishing how it contracts my heart, fetters my soul, beclouds my mind, thrusts me out of doors, and sends me off anywhere. Make the promise come first and the precept afterwards; for God works in his people to will and to do of his good pleasure; and I am sure there is no spirit of grace, or supplication, or godly fear, in their hearts till the Lord puts it there. The promise always precedes the precept, and everything that is good must come by Jesus Christ. Thus, then, passing by a great many scriptures, the Lord has set the one over against the other. What a beautiful representation this is of the blessed God! I mean, not as in my feeble way have stated it, but as it is stated by the apostle in the passage to which I have referred. And then it would be endless to carry on this idea, because this same chapter brings in the law of God. And what do you think it says about the law? It says one thing of the law, and one thing of God's grace; and which is the greater of the two? what is said of the law, or what is said of the grace of God? "Moreover, the law entered that the offence might abound." What offence? Those of you that know the Lord will go with me in what I am going to say here. When the law enters a man's conscience with "Pay what you owe," "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them," "He that offends in one point is guilty of the whole," such a one begins to say, Well, if that be it I will be a better man than I have been. And you will try to get your thoughts, and passions, and inclinations, to rights; and after laboring to do so you will read in the 7th of the Romans that "it wrought in me" this conviction, "all manner of concupiscence." I was not aware I had such a wicked heart. I was not aware I had such a wicked nature; I was not aware that my heart was such a cage of unclean birds. Having been kept externally, I was not aware that there was such sinner such a monster of a sinner. Why, the blackest Ethiopian cannot be blacker; the foulest leper cannot be filthier than I am before the Lord. That is the way sin abounds. Sin does not come from the law; but the law stirs up the dust, if I may so speak, that is in the soul, stirs up what there is there, and thus searches the heart, and brings to light what there is there; and then what is to be done! You say, I did not know I was such a sinner; so, it was with Saul of Tarsus; so, it will be with every one taught of God. Now what is to be done in this case? Why, the apostle said that that is very fast going out of fashion, "The law entered that the offence might abound." God himself brought the law into his conscience, and then the apostle spoke to others as God had spoken to him, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." What a Father, to make such a provision! What a Savior, to bring in such a provision! What a holy and blessed Spirit, to reveal such grace! What a glorious gospel! There is such a thing as so drinking in the truths of the gospel as to forget our misery, to remember our poverty no more, to pass away from the whole, and, as it were, in one sense to drop the subject of our sins, any further than we take up in connection therewith the great theme, "Unto him that loved

us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

But the Lord has also set prosperity over against adversity in the work of the Holy Spirit. And it is a mercy that we are authorized to say this; you know what is said in the 8th of the Romans upon this matter: “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope.” The creature there I take to be the new creature in Christ Jesus. We must sometimes take careful notice of even little different turns of language, for they will often give a sentence a great difference of meaning. The apostle does not there say that the creature is the subject of vanity, but subject to vanity; which he explains in the 7th of Romans, where he says that with his mind, there is the new creature, he served the law of God, with his flesh the law of sin, by the flesh being a dwelling-place for sin. Now the new man is brought into bondage, is hindered, tied, and bound hand and foot by this vanity that is in the old man, not willingly, that is, the Christian would not be thus bound, the Christian would not be thus hard-hearted, the Christian would not be thus carnally minded, the Christian would not be thus fretful, the Christian would not be thus unbelieving, the Christian would not be thus prayerless, as he feels himself often to be, he would not be thus kept at a distance from God. “Not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope.” Here, then, is the new creature subject for a time to vanity, that is, the vanity of the old man. Then comes the promise that “the creature itself also shall be delivered”, there is the positive promise, “from the bondage of corruption.” That that before is called “vanity,” to which the new creature is subjected, is, you see, here called “the bondage of corruption,” “the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” He has set, then, the one over against the other, in the work of the Holy Spirit; and “the flesh desires” for that is the way that scripture ought to be rendered, “against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would.” But if there be a willing mind, and God gives that willing mind, where there is a willing mind to serve him, though we cannot serve him as we would, yet if there be an honest and willing mind, the Lord accepts it according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not. David had a mind to build a house unto God, and he did well; it was in his heart. And many of the people of God, all of them, did I say “many” I should libel them, I should speak falsely of the people of God if I were not to say that they would all serve God, to a man, to a woman, very much better than they do if they possibly could. They can appeal to a heart-searching God and say so. I know I can. Lord, I would pray better, I would live better, I would preach better; I would be better altogether, and serve you better altogether; but I feel that I cannot do as I would do. So, then, to will is present with us, but we cannot perform that which is good without the Lord enabling us. And we have the sweet assurance of the Lord's word that the work shall go on. “The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; for his mercy endures forever” and he will not forsake the work of his own hands. There is a beautiful description of this in the 100th Psalm, and a beautiful exhortation founded upon what the Lord there said. “Know you that the Lord he is God.” and those who know Jesus Christ do hereby know that their covenant God is indeed the true, the everlasting God; as Jeremiah expresses it, the King of eternity. “It is he that has made us” to know ourselves and to know him; it is he that has thus newly created us; “and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates”, the truths of the everlasting gospel, “with thanksgiving.” Hence the apostle dwells very beautifully upon this prosperity set over against our adversity in personal experience, showing the blessedness of real religion. “For your sake we are killed all the day long;” we confess that the world is turned into a

slaughterhouse, and we Christians are regarded as the victims to be slain in the slaughterhouse of this world; and men think they are doing God service in doing away with such off scouring's as they hold us to be. "We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Why, you would think this was enough to break the man's heart, enough to sink him into despair. Ah, he saw the love of God would overcome the whole: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us;" because that love is always the same. It came to us in the depths of our calamity, and gave his dear Son; and it comes to us now, when we are in tribulation. So, then, he says, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." There cannot very much harm come to you if you are not separated from the love of God. Why, if God loves you with his whole heart and soul, and mysteriously waters the work in your soul every moment, and his eye and his heart are upon you perpetually, there cannot be much harm come then. He has thus set the eternity of his love over against the short duration of our tribulation; "for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Third, in circumstances. Some good people are not so unhappy in adverse circumstance as you might suppose; and many good people that have plenty of silver and gold are not so happy with it as some suppose. So that then we come to take a discount one way, and a discount the other, it lessens the terror of the trouble, and diminishes the attraction of the supposed good. You know two or three Sundays ago we had some strong observations, and some of you, very few, rather inclined to be like the Pharisees, who had not been, as John Warburton says, devil dragged much yet, thought Mister Wells went too far in saying that a child of God, once made alive from the dead, is sure to be saved, let him die in what state he may. And of course, I have been sharply reprov'd, and have been inform'd that no child of God can die in sin that the Lord will not let any of his children die in sin. Well, there was a man, I trust he is now in heaven too, and in the latter part of his life this world so got hold of him, gold and silver, the riches of this world, that he became a downright close-fisted man. Well, he got all his bills in except one; and when he was dying, he got that, and he took it into his hand, was delighted with it, and he died with it in his hand. Now did he not die in the sin of covetousness? And yet if he died in the faith, that faith took hold of the atonement of Christ, which took away his sin. Covetousness is such a beautiful, nice sort of thing, that people live in it and die in it, and leave a good name behind. But what is it in the sight of the living God? He declares it to be idolatry; he declares that the covetous shall not enter the kingdom of God. Well, now, what degree of covetousness, then is there that will shut a man out of the kingdom of God? I will say one thing here, that which made some of you kick a few Sundays ago, made the hearts of hundreds rejoice, that feel more of their infirmities than you do. And I will tell you something else, that a day will come, perhaps, when I am gone, when you will long for a man to speak to you that is not afraid to speak out all the truth in its liberality, amplitude, independence and glory. Ah, you may say, we were angry with him; we thought he went too far; but since he has gone, what troubles, what rebellions, what stripping's, what humbling have we been the subjects of! Would to God we could either bring him out of the grave, or have some one that would preach to us as freely and as fearlessly as he did. I will tell you one thing, if you want me to be at all quiet, for mercy's sake when I do speak do not oppose me; for you will only make me ten times worse, you may depend upon it. You will never moderate me, never; you will only make me worse. I feel when I am thus met just as David felt. If this is being vile, dancing before the ark of the everlasting covenant, I will yet be viler. I will be base in my own sight, and in the

sight of Pharisees too, and in the sight of some of the people of God too, rather than be base in God's sight. I dare not keep back part of the price. I am not sent to preach to two or three chimney corner Pharisaic old women, and I am not sent to preach to two or three old bachelors, no; I am sent to preach to sinners of all shapes, and grades and forms, and sizes. Hitherto I have done so, and I hope when I cease to do so God will stop my breath. I have always had unbounded confidence in God's truth, and I believe I always shall. I have always believed the gospel to be seaworthy, and I am not afraid to let her go afloat. Let her go; she is a ship of Tarshish. You know the little ship in which they took the apostle cruised round the coast, they must not go too far out; and they broke their necks pretty well, and broke the ship all to pieces. Not half so safe as the ships of Tarshish, that went right out into the center of the Atlantic and of the Pacific, visited all the isles, and picked up every shipwrecked sinner they could find. "Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth." I am not afraid of the gospel sinking, not a bit. Jesus Christ is there; and if he seems to be asleep, and the storm do not wake him, I will pray to him, and he will rise, rebuke the storm, conduct the ship, and all will be safe. Who ever knew a man lost where the Savior is?

So, then, he has set prosperity over against adversity in circumstances. The world was to be drowned, but the ark was in prosperity, set over against the adversity. The Israelites were in Egypt; God's interposition was the prosperity set over against their adversity. They were in the wilderness, neither food nor drink. God set the manna and the rock over against their adversity. They did not know which way to go; God set the cloud over against that to guide them. They did not know what to do; God set up a mercy-seat in their midst, that such poor miserable creatures should know what to do. They came to cross the overflowing Jordan; God set the ark over against that, and the waters on the right hand kept rising and rising mountains high, and looking down on the Israelites. Ah, we should like to rush down there and drown those Antinomian wretches, but could not; and the waters on the left hand would be glad to go off and run into the Dead Sea, never to come back again. So, your troubles will go into the Dead Sea of eternal death; they will never come back again. The Lord set the ark of the everlasting covenant over against this rolling Jordan, and they all passed clean over. What shall we set against the walls of Jericho? Oh, seven rams' horns, trumpets. It does not matter what the instrumentality is; the excellency of the power is of God. I need not remind you of David slaying Goliath, and a thousand other things. Poor Job, circumstances were very adverse with him, but the Lord set the prosperity over against Job's adversity. He did not see the prosperity as yet, but it did come. I waited some years for this chapel, but I got it at last. You waited for it? say some. Yes, I did. I could not interpret the words any other way. I used sometimes to think of the great things the Lord had done for me, and then the words would come, "You shall see greater things than these." The living chariot goes majestically on, nor asks whether it might or whether it should; its authority and power are of the blessed God. And so, they shall prosper that love him. God help you to look to him. Do not be frightened at a few troubles. It does not matter what threatens you if God does not threaten you. One of old said, "I will not fear, though ten thousand should set themselves against me," seeing the Lord is on my side. Then the apostle sets eternal glory over against adversity: "I reckon the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." But I must say no more upon this part.

We come now to *the purpose*, "to the end that man should find nothing after him." First, the world was created, and that creation was complete. Adam before the fall had too much sense to look about to see if the Lord really had completed his work. The Lord left nothing after him. Now,

Adam, cannot you do something? cannot you make some improvement? No, I cannot. Now, says the devil, Adam can do nothing to improve God's work, so I will now try and get him into my service, and so he did. Thus, then, in the work of God in creation man found nothing after him. So, in the new creation God creates the new heavens, and the new earth, and the new people, and his work is complete, nothing is found after him. So, with the ark, it was God's ark, and it was completed, nothing found after him. Again, the dear Savior's life. He has brought in eternal righteousness, and after he has obeyed the law you can find nothing more to do, nothing to add to it nor to take from it. So, his wonderful atonement. You can find nothing after it; not one spot, not one wrinkle, not one blemish is left; you can find nothing after it. All is finished, and our hearts rejoice at it. Lastly, the final blessedness of the saints. God has set that prosperity of his grace over against the adversity of sin and death and trouble, and that prosperity shall so prevail that he shall do, I tell you this emphatically and solemnly, what no creature can do, namely, "he shall wipe away all tears from off all faces," that is, of his people. We cannot say that of any fellow-creature. Some of us have lost dear relatives; we were obliged to let them die, and they are gone; we cannot call them back. And you, as a people, are kind to the poor; you have wiped away many of their tears, but you cannot wipe them all away; there will be some left. And the kindest friend, a creature, of course can only partially assist his fellow-creature, so that after you have done all you can there is still something for another to do; there is still something left. Not so with our God. When he has completed his work there will be no need unsupplied; there will be no wound that is not perfectly healed; there will be no tear that is not perfectly wiped away; there will be no sorrow, death, or pain that has not fled. "To the end that man should find nothing after him." Oh, what a wonderful scene it presents! And if I am speaking to any this morning that do not feel the importance of personal godliness, of being born again and knowing the Lord, may the Lord make you to feel what a poor lost sinner you are, and bring you to prize this wonderful godliness. For what worldly friend, what worldly prosperity, can you set over against your adversity that will wipe away all your tears? There is still death left, still the threatening's of the Bible left. But if you are a believer in God's truth and a lover of God's Christ, then the prosperity of Jesus will wipe away the last tear, and man shall find nothing after him.