

THE ORACLES OF GOD

A SERMON

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“If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.” 1 Peter 4:11

THERE is in Church history a tradition that Peter went to Rome became Bishop of Rome, and was there crucified with his head down wards, having refused to be crucified in any other way. This is the tradition. But it is a tradition without any support, and ought not without proper evidence, to be received. For the word of the Lord rather tells against Peter having ever been at Rome at all. We find in 1st of John how Peter was, by the instrumentality of his brother, brought into acquaintance with Jesus Christ. We then, secondly, learn how he was brought from his occupation as a fisherman to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. We then find him on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. We then find him, some years afterwards, at Joppa. Then we find him at Caesarea; then we find him at Antioch. In all these cases either in the land of Canaan or east of that land, but never west of it. The apostle Paul, it appears, was called by grace about three years after the Savior's resurrection; and three years after his call, that is, about six years after the Savior's resurrection, the apostle went up to Jerusalem, and Peter was still there. Fourteen years afterwards Peter was still there (see Acts 15th). And then, about twenty-seven years after the Savior's resurrection, Peter, it appears, wrote this epistle; and the last verse but one of this epistle shows that Peter was at Babylon when he wrote it. And if Peter were about the age, which I suppose he was, of his Lord and Master, he must have been now somewhere about sixty years old when he wrote this epistle at Babylon, which you know is a long way to the east of Canaan, in an opposite direction to Rome. After this we find no more of him beyond his writing another epistle. There is, therefore, in the Bible everything against the notion that Peter was ever at Rome at all. We have no proof of his being there; circumstances tell against the idea of his being there at all. And then, secondly, if Peter had been at Rome, it would have been unapostolic, it would have been inconsistent with his mission, for him to have become Bishop of Rome. The apostles' mission was to go and preach the gospel in all the world to every creature, and no one apostle was allowed to settle down anywhere. The notion, then, of his being Bishop of Rome is contrary to his office. But we will suppose that Peter had gone to Rome, and suppose that he had been Bishop of Rome, as the Catholics assert. Even then there would be an insuperable difficulty in showing any real analogy between Peter and the Pope of Rome. We see how Peter became acquainted with Jesus Christ; we see how Peter was called to the ministry by Jesus Christ; we see how the Holy Spirit descended upon him on the day of Pentecost; we see how the Holy Spirit directed him to Caesarea;

we see how he preached to Cornelius, and how the Holy Ghost descended. We thus see how and in what way Peter became an apostle. Now what analogy is there between the way in which Peter became an apostle of Jesus Christ and the way in which a man becomes the Pope of Rome? Peter became an apostle independently of human laws altogether. If you trace the matter out you will perceive that his call in the first place was by grace, that his call to the ministry was by the Savior, independently of human laws, and that his preaching on the day of Pentecost; at Caesarea, yes, his preaching down to the very last, was independently of human laws. Now everybody knows that a man becomes the Pope of Rome by a concatenation of temporal circumstances, by human device, by human laws, and human doings altogether. There is no more religion in making a man a Pope than there is in electing a man to the Presidential chair of the United States. There is just as much religion in constituting a man the President of the United States as there is in constituting a man the Pope of Rome. And I am sure if the Catholics themselves could be divested of their bitterness against what they suppose to be heresy, and against the people they suppose to be heretics, and if they could read the Bible for themselves, they would see that there was no analogy between the two; and that, therefore, the pretension of the Popes to be the successors of Peter is as destitute of proof as anything can well be. It is not for us to prove that Peter was not at Rome, but it is for them to prove he was there. It is not for us to prove he was not Bishop of Rome, but it is for them to prove he was Bishop of Rome. It is not for us to prove that the Pope is not Peter's successor, but it is for them to prove that he is his successor, that the Pope became a Pope by being called by the same grace, by having poured into his soul the same Holy Spirit, and by preaching the same truths to multitudes of people to their conversion as Peter did. Let the Pope prove this, and we will listen to him. In all the writings of the late Cardinal Wiseman there was not anything in which he more signally failed than in his attempt to prove a unity between the apostle Peter and the Pope of Rome. The antagonisms are too many and too mighty to be anything else but antagonisms. It is a remarkable thing that the apostle Peter should be inspired to put upon record such words as these, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;" as though he had a kind of presentiment that in his name traditions, human inventions, and human assumptions would spring up; and that therefore he himself comes forward as a kind of witness against the very things that should afterwards be done in his name. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Thus, then, we see how easy it is to assume things; but we ourselves in these tremendous matters must always call for proof. And let us increasingly rejoice that our faith is to stand not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

Now I have, this morning, first, to explain *what is meant by the oracles of God*. Secondly, to show that *if we are in harmony with the oracles of God, as here intended, we are in harmony with everything that pertains to God*. Thirdly and lastly, *the blessedness of the oracles of God*. First, then, *what is meant by the oracles of God*. And we must commence by taking this word in the singular. We find that the same word that in Exodus is translated "mercy-seat" is in after parts of the Old Testament translated "oracle." And you will find in the 8th chapter of the First Book of Kings, at the 6th verse, that "the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, into the oracle of the house;" and that oracle is explained to be the holy place, "to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim's." When the word "oracle" is taken thus in the singular, it means, therefore, in the first place, a special revelation from God. David understood this when he said, "I will lift up my hands toward your holy oracle." Therefore, apart from noticing the original word, in one place translated "mercy-seat," in another place "oracle," apart from this the mere English reader can see that the holy place, meaning all that was in it, was called the oracle.

This oracle simply means that revelation that we have by the sacrificial perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the oracle, the special revelation of the blessed God. Hence in the 9th chapter of Leviticus you read that “Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat; which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.” Then when Solomon’s prayer was ended the fire came again on that occasion and accepted the sacrifice, and the people fell on their faces and praised the Lord, saying, “The Lord is good, for his mercy endures forever.” Thus, then, you see that by the oracle is meant that covenant, that good will of God, which is by Jesus Christ. I will just go back again to these points. Aaron came down from offering the sin offering. Now, then, here is a revelation, and it is that that includes everything, the sin offering. Jesus Christ was the sin offering; and whatever sin had demerited, or whatever sin there was, is put away by the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. Being brought to receive him thus as having finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, that it is done, this is God’s special revelation; this is the mercy-seat, this is the holy oracle, this is the way in which we are to have access to God, by what the Savior has thus done. Here, then, is the sin offering. And next comes the burnt offering; referring of course to the Savior enduring the wrath of God. So that as a sin offering there is no more sin, and as a burnt offering there is no more wrath. Hence the word of God is clear upon this; yea, the Lord has himself in a solemn declaration said that he will not be angry with us nor rebuke us. And then comes the peace offering, to denote that there is to be no more war. What a sweet representation that gives! that is to say, that by the perfection of Christ’s offering as a sin offering, and by the perfection of his offering as a burnt offering, the Lord shall so reconcile the people to himself that there shall be war no more between God and them. Hence it is called the peace offering, because we thus have peace with God, and the Lord comes and says, Now I have nothing against you. Your heart sins are atoned for, your lip sins are atoned for, your life sins are atoned for, nothing against you. The wrath that has been lighted up is extinguished, the sword laid aside; there is no more war. Read through Ezekiel’s account of the city and John’s account of the city; you find no conflict, a glorious city, everything calm. Not the slightest sign of winter, for the tree bear fruit all the year through; and not the slightest sign of death or of storm; all is calm: yet not sullenly calm, not gloomily calm, but paradisiacally and delightfully so. Now this is the oracle, then; this is God’s special revelation. And “if any man speak” if any man make a profession, for that is how I take it; I will say nothing about ministers, for they are a very sensitive tribe, and the less I say about them the better; but we will let the words apply to every Christian that makes a profession of religion, if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” If you make a profession, let your testimony accord with the oracles of God. Now is it so with us? It is. And here is the secret of all the prosperity we have had and all the prosperity we shall yet have. And I hope we have not yet seen our best days. I have a sort of feeling in my soul that the Lord will yet be mighty in our midst. Now here is the secret, namely, our receiving and abiding firmly by the perfection of Christ as the sin offering. Never mind what men call it; never mind what they call you; never mind what they say. You are convinced from your own soul’s experience of your need of it; you are convinced from God’s word of the truth of it. He is the end of sin. Hold that fast, abide by it, and you cannot be conquered. It is sin that has conquered you; but if you hold fast this testimony you have a standing where there is no sin, you cannot be conquered. Hold fast the burnt offering, Christ as the burnt offering, as the end of wrath. And if you pray to the Lord, and you

think he is angry with you, you must attribute that to your weakness, to your legal bias, to your carnal views of him. He is not angry in Christ; he rests in his love, and declares again and again the spotlessness of his people, and their freedom from condemnation. Hold fast also Christ as the peace offering. How is it possible for you ever to be at war with God again? I mean in essential matters. I do not mean in some of his providential dealings, for there we do and shall rebel more or less to the end of our days. But I am speaking now of essential matters. When you take into consideration these three truths, how can you do otherwise than love him? First, that such is your state as a sinner, that he might banish you justly to everlasting woe. Second that so far from his doing so he has provided a ransom, he has sent a Savior by whom your sin is put away, by whom the wrath is put away, and by whom you are thus reconciled to God, not imputing your trespasses unto you. And then, third, that while he might have had everything against you, he has everything for you. He has assured us that “all things,” let them be whatever they may, “shall work for good to them that love God, that are the called according to his purpose.” This, then, is the oracle, or the special revelation of God to man. If any man speaks, and thus makes a profession, let it be in accordance with this perfection of Christ, with this special revelation of the blessed God.

Now let us here bring in the plural, the oracles. Let us see how nicely this one truth, this special revelation, this perfection of Christ, let us see how beautifully that one truth harmonizes with every other gospel truth; and if we are in accordance with this one truth, this special revelation, that will bring us into harmony with all the rest. First, take the love of God. How nicely the work of Christ accords with the love of God! Is the love of God free? So did the Savior live and die freely, not conditionally. Is the love of God everlasting? So is the salvation that Christ has wrought. And is the love of God great? So is the salvation that Christ has wrought. And again, how it accords with election! Is it an election of grace? In other words, where are we chosen? Chosen in Christ Jesus. See, then, it is an election of grace; and how his work accords with that election!

“’Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb,
Who all my sorrows took.”

Being, then, an election of grace, it required a mediation that should carry out the purpose of this election, to fulfil that truth where it is said “that our election should stand not of works.” See, then, human merit in the matter would not accord with election. Election is of grace. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.” See, then, also how this special revelation of the work of Christ accords with divine predestination; “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will.” “For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now God having thus ordained the people to eternal life by Jesus Christ, see how his work accords with that decree. Can that decree fail? You see the perfection of the work carries out the certainty of this decree. Then, again, see how nicely it accords also with regeneration. Yes, the Savior himself, by being the end of death, by swallowing up death in victory, he himself is the resurrection. Hence the apostle would give us to understand that if we are called by grace, if we have spiritual life, it is by Jesus Christ, for “he has quickened us together with him, and raised us up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Then, again, see how his work accords with perseverance. How is it you do not leave off believing? Why, because his mediatorial work will not let you leave him. How is it you do not leave off praying? Why, because his mediatorial work will not let you leave

off praying. And how is it you do not give up your hope, and sink into despair? Why, because his mediatorial work will not let you give up your hope. Suppose, for instance, you say to yourself, Well, I am that hard, dark, poor, sinful, wretched, miserable sort of creature, that I am sure I am anything but a Christian. And suppose these words come at the same time, "The blood of Jesus Christ," God's Son, "cleanses from all sin." Well, then, say you, how can I despair? Or suppose these words come, "You are complete in him." Then how can I despair? Suppose these words come, "He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Then how can I despair? seeing that his precious blood is infinitely more able to save than sin to destroy. See, then, how his work accords with the love of God, with election, with predestination, with regeneration, and with perseverance. Then see, also, how beautifully his work accords with the suddenness of glory to the soul; for "absent from the body, present with the Lord." Now what is it that gives us an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? What is it that gives us boldness of access to God now? Is it not written that "we have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter into the holy of holies"? Is that our boldness now? What is to be our boldness in a dying hour? Why, the same thing. We are to overcome in death, just as we have in life, by faith in the blood of the Lamb. And what is to be the ground of our resurrection? Why, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, he having swallowed up death in victory. Now would human works accord, be in harmony with, the resurrection of the body? Can human works destroy corruption, destroy mortality, destroy our earthly state, and give us in the place thereof that which is described in the 15th of the 1st Epistle to Corinthians? Certainly not. But the work of Christ does all this. Then, again, see how the work of Christ accords with glory. The saints are to have all the glory that his work can bring them to. "The glory which you gave me have I given them; that they all may be one." Then the continuation of glory; see how the work of Christ also accords with that; for "he has perfected forever them that are sanctified," and they shall reign with him for ever and ever.

Thus, then, our profession must be in harmony, first, with the oracle of God; that is, with what is indicated by the ark, the mercy-seat, the high priest, and the sacrifice, all of which are found in Christ Jesus the Lord. And if our profession be in harmony with, that, then it will be in harmony with all the oracles of God; taking the oracles of God here to mean not the Bible at large, but to mean the gospel testimonies of the word of God. If any man speaks, then, let him speak in accordance herewith. Here we stand in entire harmony with all the perfections of God; here we stand in entire harmony with everything that pertains to God-ward. It is wonderful, the more one is taken up with it, how true the word of God is; that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. It is only to know him rightly, and you know the love of God; it is only to know him rightly, and you know the electing grace of God; it is only to know him rightly, and you know, the counsel of God, the salvation of God, the grace and mercy of God, fellowship with God. In a word, rightly to know the Savior is to know everything.

But, secondly, I notice that, *if we are in harmony with the oracles of God as here intended, we are in harmony with everything that pertains to God.* If you are in harmony with the sacrifice, the mediatorial work of Christ, that brings you into harmony with all the truths of the gospel. But we have two more things to deal with, that I cannot myself see how we can be in harmony with, but by the work of Jesus Christ. And the two things are these. First, God's law. And what is said of the work of Christ in relation to it? Why, it is positively declared that Jesus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. The law has no more against me as I stand in Christ than as though it did not exist. He is the end thereof for righteousness. He has, by his obedient life, magnified the law.

“Do we then, through faith, make void the law? We establish it,” by the righteous life of Jesus Christ. And its majesty also in the shape of penalty was maintained in that Jesus Christ was made a curse for us. So that here is entire harmony with the law. Can the law be holier than I am as I stand in Christ? Impossible. Can the law be more spiritual than I am as I stand in Christ? Impossible. Can the law be more just or righteous than we are as we stand in Christ? Impossible. Can the law be better than we are as we stand in Christ? Impossible. Can the law be more perfect than we are perfect in Christ? Impossible. Can the law be more stable than our standing is in Christ? Impossible. For in order for the law to be superior to the people it must be superior to Christ himself; for he is their Representative. Here, then, if any man would be in harmony with God’s law, as the Lord lives, it must be by faith in Christ. Here the law is established; here everything is calm, and all is well. That is the way I deal with that. I would not have the law taken from the Bible, for by it is the knowledge of sin; and he that handles the law wisely will get good. The apostle said that that he was reproached for in his day, and it is almost dangerous now to touch upon his idea, and to follow it. For the general notion is that the law was given as a rule of justification before God. The apostle Paul said, “The law was added because of transgression; and that the offence might abound;” that is, that men might by the law be convinced of the evil of sin, of the abounding of sin. We are not to suppose the law to be the minister of sin; we are not to suppose that the law is the author of sin. That would be to make the fountain of purity the source of impurity; that would be to make the fountain, as it were, of righteousness the source of unrighteousness. But when he said that the law entered that the offence might abound, he means, of course, in the conviction thereof; when a man has such a conviction of his state that he is brought to say, as David did, “My iniquities are gone over my head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me,” here is the use of the law, then, to convince the sinner of his utterly ruined condition, “He that offends in one point is guilty of the whole.” “Cursed is the man that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” Then we have one thing more to deal with, and that is the broken covenant. Now what does the apostle say to that? And I understand that broken covenant to mean all the threatening’s of the Bible. But now there is not a threatening in the Bible against you; there is not a threatening in the Bible against sinners in one prophet or in one apostle that is not included in the apostle’s idea, namely, that “he has” it is strong language, but beautiful too, “he has blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, taking it away, nailing it to his cross.” Let any one of you that know your own heart read through Jeremiah, look at the threatening’s. Why do not these threatening’s fall upon you? Why does not the Lord so deal with you? And in some of the Epistles; how is it that these threatening’s do not fall upon you? No reason can be assigned but this one, that you are a believer in Jesus Christ, that you do receive Jesus Christ, and he has blotted out every threatening in the Bible against you, and which was contrary to you, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. Thus Heaven has ordained this glorious harmony of things. Hell, itself cannot demonstrate a flaw or a fault in the whole scene. What a wondrous change of scene, then, is thus brought about! “If any man speak,” make a profession, let him look to it; let him see that he is in harmony with the special revelation of God, the oracle, Christ Jesus in the perfection of his work; let him see to it that he is thereby in harmony with all the truths of the gospel; let him see to it that he is thereby also in harmony with the truth that Christ has taken away our sin, has thus blotted out all the threatening’s, and has left nothing but promises, and precepts, and counsels that are kind for his people. Well, this is a nice gospel to live in. It is a nice thing to retire of a night and say, Well, I have a great many, things against myself; I cannot help finding fault with myself, and loathe myself, and abhor myself. But God, my Creator and Judge, has nothing against me; it is all put

away. And when you rise in the morning, O Lord, be with me through the day in my calling. I need your hand; I am sure to make some blunder or other if left to myself. Be with me and bless me; and whatever customers or friends I need, Lord, you can bring them. Give me wisdom. I shall not get through the day without some wrong thoughts or other, for I sin every day; “for there is not a just man upon earth that does good, and sins not;” and I am sure to have something against myself before the night. But the Lord will have nothing against me; he will be with me all day long. And when I come to die by-and-bye, what have I to lean upon? What have I to look to? I can’t lean upon my life, that won’t do; I can’t lean upon anything I have done, that will not do, for I see there are infirmities and faults mingled with the whole. If I have preached, if I have prayed, if I have given to the poor, if I have done to the uttermost, I have spoiled it all; sure, to mingle some infirmity or another. If I gave five shillings to the poor, I thought next day what a fool I was; half a crown would have done as well. And if I gave a shilling at the collection, I thought afterwards sixpence would have done as well; and if I have given a fourpenny piece, I thought afterwards I might have saved a penny, three-pence would have done as well? And if I have done a friend a favor, I have been half sorry for it afterwards; if I had known as much as I do now, I would not have done it. Sure, to spoil it somehow. I know I have sometimes, I candidly confess it, given a two-shilling piece to a poor man, and I have thought afterwards a shilling might have done just as well. Another has come, and told me a good tough story; I have given him half a crown, and I have thought afterwards, What a fool I was! I dare say he has cheated me. So, I am sure to spoil it. There is nothing in my own doings I can lean upon. But when I look to the Lord Jesus Christ, he took our sins and never regretted it; endured the curse, never regretted it; dispersed abroad, gave to the poor, never regretted it; laid down his life, never regretted it; gave exceeding great and precious promises, never regretted it; said to his disciples, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world,” never regretted it. Bless his dear name, he never regretted anything that he did. We may as well be humble; the only way of being in entire harmony with our own welfare and with God himself is by the perfection we have in Christ Jesus. This is a beautiful way; and though I have not spoken of it perhaps in a very profitable way, the Lord lead you to think of it more profitably than I have spoken; it is a beautiful way of being in harmony, first, with the oracle of God, that is, the perfect work of Christ, and by being in harmony with that you are in harmony with every truth of the gospel and every precept. All our shortcomings in the precepts are met by that completeness we have in Christ the Lord. If what I have said this morning be true, then nine-tenths of the gospels of the present day are not worth having.

But I must come to my last point, *the blessedness of the oracles of God*. He that called this and all other worlds into being and order, for him to say to a poor creature like you, “I, the everlasting God, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward;” for him, which he does to every believer, faith is a kind of evidential title, all belongs to them, for him to say unto you, “I am with you in all places, and will not leave you till I have done that I have spoken to you of;” for him to say, “Be of good courage; no man shall be able to stand before you. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you;” if there are seas to meet, I will roll them back; if there are deserts to cross, I will be with you there and supply your need; if there be Jordan’s to meet, I will divide them; if there be mountainous impediments, the mountains shall leap like rams and skip like lambs; whatever there is in the way, “I am with you; I will never leave you; I will never forsake you; I will strengthen you; I will uphold you; I will bless you.” And are you afraid as to what will become of you when you get old? Why, “even to your old age I am he.” Your earthly friends may die, but I shall not die; your earthly friends may be offended, but I shall not be offended; your earthly friends and your circumstances

may change, but I shall not, change: “even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you.” God help us by his Holy Spirit more and more to appreciate the great truths of the gospel. What the Lord has said must indeed be fulfilled:

“On this firm rock believers build.
His truth must stand, his word prevail,
And not one jot nor tittle fail.”

“If any man speak,” then, “let him speak,” not as the oracles of man, but “as the oracles of God.” Let us, therefore, go on to detest Popish doctrines, to reject Church of Englandism. For I do; the system itself I hate. I love the good men that are in that part of Babylon, but the system itself I hate. It is a usurpation of the prerogatives of the Most High, parliamentary bishops, parliamentary made parsons. Dissenters in our day are not half Dissenters. Do not be afraid to stand up for God’s oracles. “He that has a dream, let him tell a dream.” that is, if it be worth telling; “and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” “If any man speak,” then, “let him speak as the oracles of God,” I am not ashamed to own and declare publicly that I hate every *ism* and every doctrine that at all interferes with the completeness of God’s eternal truth. There does appear to me to be something so paltry, so contemptible, in human invention. Here is the Pope dressed up like an old monkey, with his triple crown. Here is the bishop wearing his silk apron about the streets, and looking just what he is. All sorts of paltry things invented, and then want us to suppose that it is religion! Why, what is religion? Religion is the entering of the eternal Spirit of God into the soul, laying open to that man what he is as a sinner, and what sin is; sweeping away everything, and leading him into the knowledge of the perfection of Christ, the covenant of God, the mercy of God, and the truth of God.