

A VISION FROM GOD

A SERMON

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“I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it.” Daniel 8:27

THE things contained in this vision are the same in substance which were revealed to Daniel forty years before, as recorded in the 2nd chapter. And the same things in substance that were revealed to him two years before, in the preceding chapter. And the first thing, perhaps, that he would be astonished at would be the blindness of the world, for he saw in this vision that there was not anything that the world would fight so maliciously against as they would that only gospel that could do them good and could save them, as they would that people that were brought to receive that gospel, and as they would that Jesus Christ that came into the world to save sinners. This vision or revelation was made to the prophet with power, it came in all its solemnity and force, so far as to cast him down and literally make him ill in body. He was so cut up in contemplation, first, of the state of the world; and then, secondly, he would see amplified what is recorded in the 60th Psalm: “You have showed your people hard things; you have made us to drink the wine of astonishment.” He saw in this revelation torrents of blood of the saints that would flow from the tyranny of their adversaries. And then also he would be astonished at that discriminating grace by which some were made to, differ, and by which they were enabled to bear up under all these trials, and to come off more than conquerors at the last. And yet it was then as it is now, there was among people, and among professors too, I should think indeed, a general indifference as to the meaning of these things. “I was astonished at the vision,” I was swallowed up in it “but none understood.” The language of the carnal mind is, I can get on in the world very well without understanding these mysterious things, and therefore I shall not trouble myself about them. And yet the prophets inquired and searched diligently what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” These prophets knew that nothing could, by any possibility, so much concern mankind as this great matter of Christ's sufferings and the glory that should follow. And even angels in this matter reprove us, for “the angels desire to look into these things.” And perhaps even this morning there will be a little impatience among some of you while I try to set before you the sum and substance of this vision, though there is everything that concerns us.

This vision bears a twofold aspect, it has history, and it has its mystery. And when the prophet said, “None understood it,” I should suppose he means none comparatively; that he means only a very few understood it. Hence, if you amuse people with ceremonies, human inventions, and

human doings, all of which are easily comprehended, they are satisfied, and feel no impatience. They were happier in worshipping the visible golden calf than in worshipping the invisible, the inconceivable God. Such is our constitution by nature, sin having thus disinterested us in eternal things. There is nothing that Satan so much dreads as he does the light of the deep mysteries of the everlasting kingdom of God shining into the souls of men. I will take a twofold view of the text. First, here is *the vision*, or the revelation made to Daniel; secondly, *the lamentation*.

First, *the vision*. The history of this vision can be told in a very few words. This vision is introduced by bringing before us a certain organized power that should go on, century after century, doing what this vision declares that tyrannical power should do; and what this vision declares that tyrannical power should do, it has done, and I do trust that its work is finished; I trust that power of tyranny is gone, and gone forever. And Daniel saw in this; in the first place, the foreknowledge of God, that the adversary can neither do, nor attempt to do, anything that the Lord did not foreknow and fully understand; and secondly, Daniel would see that the Lord was prepared on behalf of his people to meet every circumstance that should arise in the progress of their history, in their experience, and in the circumstances through which they should pass. And thirdly, Daniel would see also the truthfulness of the blessed God, that everything the Lord said should come to pass did come to pass. And then Daniel would also see the terribleness, yet at the same time righteousness, of God's judgments upon his adversaries; he would also see the eternal triumph of the saints. And amidst these things it is remarkable that the Lord places Daniel as a kind of pattern of all his people; for what the Lord said in conclusion to Daniel was not merely for Daniel, but for all that are of the same faith, that are brought to believe in the same glorious Messiah, and to walk in the same steps. So, after revealing to Daniel the terrible convulsions and revolutions that should take place, and the torrents of blood that should flow, he nevertheless says to Daniel lastly, as though he should say, This shall conclude your book, and it shall be expressive of your ultimate end. "Go your way till the end be for you shall rest and stand in your lot at the end of the days." Such a promise is worth more than all the gold and silver of the world.

Now I will just give a word or two upon the history of this vision. You will see in the 21st verse of this chapter that the Grecian kingdom is meant; we will take that as a key to the history of this vision. We read that there was a great horn, that is, the great power of the Grecian king. By and by this "great horn was broken, and from it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven." This great horn, of course, was that great ruling power that Alexander the Great acquired; and, as you all know, he died by the same thing that thousands and tens of thousands have died of since, namely, by the excess of intoxicating drink. He was broken, as it were, all at once, and his vast empire divided to the four winds, just as Daniel here said it would be. Then up there springs a little horn out of this empire and plucks up the three preceding ones. This little horn does not remain little, long; it waxes great towards the south, that is, towards Egypt, south of Judea; and towards the east for this little horn is nothing else but the Roman power in the east; not the western, but the eastern power of Rome, that sprang up in the east after the death of Alexander the Great. This little horn became great by its oneness with the Roman empire, and that Roman empire extended its frontier in the east, to the great river, the river Euphrates, to the south Egypt, and towards the pleasant land. This little horn waxed great and began to be organized and developed into a tyrannical and persecuting power. And while in this chapter the little horn is represented as rising from the Grecian empire, in the 7th chapter it is represented as rising among the ten kings or kingdoms, that is, among the kingdoms of the Roman empire. There may seem a little

discrepancy here, but if you will look into the matter you will see it perfectly harmonizes, for the little horn in both places is one and the same. Now remember that the Roman empire, as every schoolboy will tell you, was founded 753 years before the birth of the Savior; so that in Daniel's time this tyrannical power, that was to become so conspicuous, was already 200 years old; and when Alexander died, 321 years before the birth of the Savior, the Roman Empire was 400 years old, and therefore was well prepared to augment its eastern power. This I understand, then, to be the little horn. It is most astounding to me that there should ever be any controversy among divines as to the meaning of this. Remember, the horn does not mean any one man, nor even any one dynasty of men; but it simply means a tyrannical power that is formed, let the persons that wield that power be who they may. Now this little horn, that by its oneness with the Roman empire waxed great, the first peculiar manifestation of it was when Christ was born. What government was it that sought the young child's life? What government was it that put the infants of Bethlehem to death? Well, say you, it was the government of Herod. But the Bible shows us that it was the Roman eastern government, that was one with the western government. And who was it that put the Savior to death? Are you not told in this same chapter that this horn, that is, this tyrannical government, should wax great, even to the host of heaven, should cast down some of the host of heaven and of the stars, and should stamp upon them, and that it should magnify itself against the prince of the host, namely, against Christ, and put him to death? Is there any doubt about it? Who thus put the Savior to death? What power was it that put James, the brother of John, to death? Or to go further back, what power was it that beheaded John the Baptist? and what power was it that followed up those persecutions to the time of Constantine, though the persecutions met, by several of the emperors, relieving sort of checks? And Constantine made the great mistake of uniting the Christian religion to the state. Out of that union arose the tyrannical power of Rome, so that Rome papal carried on the work of Rome pagan, until it had done its work. Thus, then the little horn, the Bible clearly shows, was originally the power of the empire of Alexander the Great. When the Romans came into the east, by small beginnings they absorbed all the empire of Alexander the Great, or nearly all, as I have said, so far to the east as the Euphrates; and thus, they plucked up the other three horns or powers by the roots. Thus, as the empire of Alexander the Great was at his death divided towards the four winds, the Roman power in the east became the little horn of one fourth part of the Grecian empire, and then absorbed or plucked up the other three parts or horns by the roots. We find that the Roman empire in its earlier days is spoken of as ten horns, a definite number for an indefinite, to denote the many kingdoms that made up that empire. But in Revelation, 17, where the Roman Empire in its latter days is called "ten horns," you do not there have the little, horn arising; it is in the earlier part of the Roman empire that the little horn rises, but in the latter part there is no more power to arise. The power of pagan Rome is come to an end, the same as that of Rome papal, already virtually has. The world perhaps was never in a better state as to Christian liberty than it is now. The world seems to be utterly weary of all tyranny of every kind, and God grant that the feeling may increase until the real liberty of conscience is universally understood and enjoyed. Thus then, I see no difficulty in understanding the little horn that became great, carried on its persecutions, and did all that the prophet foresaw it would do. But I have to do more with the mystery of this vision than with the history; after I have just once more reminded you (and that a doctrine I should like to see engraved upon the minds of the people), that all the dates or notes of time given in Daniel and the Revelation, every one of them are mystic. You must not understand any of them literally; they denote certain periods of time that God alone knows the duration of. Therefore, when men tell us that such and such events are to take place at

such and such times, they talk of what they know nothing at all about; for these are times and seasons which the Father has put in his own power and keeps them in his own power.

But let us look at the vision mystically. And I can give but a little sample of the people of God as presented in this vision. They are called “the host of heaven”; they are called “the stars of heaven.” And then we have, secondly, the death of Jesus Christ, that is another subject we have in this vision. And then, thirdly, we have this tyrannical power casting the truth down to the ground, practicing and prospering. First, then, we come to that which, after all, more immediately concerns us, that this power “waxed great, even to the host of heaven.” Now here the Lord's people are called “the host of heaven,” because they are born from heaven, they have a new kingdom, and they have a new inheritance; indeed, though on earth, they are already citizens of heaven; though in the world, they are not of the world. Amidst all these things, then, where are we? Are we among the friends, or among the foes? I will now, with all the care possible, point out what it is to be among the friends. They are called “the host of heaven,” and I will take Jeremiah 3:19 to guide me in this matter, where the Lord says, “How shall I put you among the children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, You shall call me, My father; and shall not turn away from me.” The next verse, the 20th, belongs to another subject, and has nothing whatever to do with the 19th verse that I have quoted. “How shall I put you among the children?” You at once see what a solemnly important matter this is. And you all know what dreadful delusions have existed in the world upon this matter, “the various ways in which men make Christians. But let us hear what the apostle says, “You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” So, then the Lord puts a sinner among his children by convincing him of his state as a sinner and leads him to know his need of the great Substitute, Christ Jesus the Lord. He convinces that man that nothing, no, nothing but the blood of Emmanuel can cleanse him before God from sin; that nothing, no, nothing but the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ can justify him before God: and that nothing, no nothing but God's eternal, infallible mercy, according to that rule laid down by himself, “Hearken unto me, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David”, that nothing but this can save him. If that be the feeling you have, then you will be able to follow the other parts of the verse. “How shall I put you among the children?” If you are thus taught, you can read your experience in many places in the Bible; and when you hear a man tell out how he was brought into soul trouble, what his heart trembling, doubting, and fearing's were, and can tell you something of the first scripture or sermon, or hymn, that gave him a little hope, you can go with it; you can feel your oneness with that man; you understand the matter, and thus you get among the children. “And give you a pleasant land,” the land of gospel freedom, and that land will be to you a pleasant land. If we can understand what the land is, and if it be pleasant to us, so pleasant that we prefer it above all lands, then that is another evidence of being among his children. Let us look at the Lord Jesus Christ here. Is not the Savior that field which the Lord has blessed? Is not the Savior that land that yields everything? And if we are taught of God, he to us is very pleasant, his name is very pleasant, his complex person is very pleasant, the relations he bears are very pleasant, the work he has achieved is very pleasant, and so also will be the order of truth with which he is connected. God's everlasting love will be to us a pleasant land. “How fair and how pleasant are you, O love, for delights.” God's electing grace will be to us a very pleasant thing. It will be a very pleasant thing to be able to rejoice that our names are written in heaven, a very pleasant thing to look back and see our names in life's fair book set down, and from thence look forward and behold eternal joy as our own. That he has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation, will be to us a very pleasant truth, and that he was pleased to command the

light to shine into our souls, to give us the light of the knowledge of truth in Christ Jesus, will be to us very pleasant; you are complete in Him is a truth which will be to us very pleasant. The precept, the counsel, the advice which the Savior gives, will be to us very pleasant; and wisdom's ways to us will be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace. "A goodly heritage." What heritage is that? that is a great thing the Psalmist said, when he uttered those words, "You have given me the heritage of them that fear your name." And if we ask what the heritage is? we have the answer in a few words. "It shall", no uncertainty about it, let the troubles, affliction, adversities, burdens, infirmities, be what they may, "it shall be well with them that fear God," everything shall be subservient to the furtherance of their welfare. "A goodly heritage of the hosts of nations." And if you would like to have another version of the heritage of the hosts of nations, you have nothing to do but run through Revelation 7, there you will find the hosts of nations, "out of all nations, kindred's, tongues and people" hunger no more, thirst no more, sin nor sorrow anymore. The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them to fountains of living waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. "And I said, You shall call me my father, and shall not turn away from me." This is a very favorite scripture of mine. It is now forty-three years since the Lord circumcised my ear, and I have not been able to hear any other gospel from that day to this; since the Lord circumcised heart, and my heart closes against every other gospel but this, "I will and they shall" gospel of the everlasting God. The Savior set the seal of his truth upon my heart at that time, and there it is now, and upon my arm, and there it is now. "You shall not turn away from me." I am sometimes afraid the Lord will send me away, but I have no desire to go away; I am sometimes afraid I shall not be found among his dear children, but I have no desire to forsake them, no desire to turn away from him. Where would you turn to? there is nothing then but to turn to self, and you may as well turn to the devil as to yourself, to our own works, for "by the works of the law shall no man living be justified." Would you turn to the world? Why, the world is to be destroyed, there is nowhere to turn to. Oh, what a happy people are they that are thus brought amongst the people of God to understand the truth, Christ made pleasant to them, and the order of eternal truth made pleasant also. "I was astonished at the vision." And are not the people of God for signs and for wonders? I should not think much of your religion if it did not make you a wonder to yourself: Why was I made to differ? There was I like a wild ass's colt, running east, west, north, and south, over this sin-blighted and sin-blasted world, in quest of what I never could have found, happiness, rest, and peace; but the time came when I was obliged to think of my soul and eternal things; my wandering feet were turned to tread the heavenly road. I have sought the Lord, and I have not sought him in vain; I can now understand his truth, I am happy with him; he has forgiven me, sanctified me, justified me, saved me, honored me, kept me, loved me, chosen me, and I shall be his for ever and ever. "I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." But you must understand it, or else you will be lost.

But the second part of the mystery, "He magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away." That I apprehend means two things, while it is true historically that the Roman power did put an end to the Levitical sacrifices by destroying the temple and all pertaining to it, I should question whether there is not another meaning latent there. He shall take away the daily sacrifice, that is, Christ Jesus. Does Popery give us the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross? I answer, No. Popery is the incarnation of heathenism, Popery is simply Christianity heathenized. You will find all the same show among the heathen that you find in these systems, they take away in the effect the true sacrifice. But when once the Lord has led a soul to know what that sacrifice is, you cannot take it away from that man; you might take it away from

them that know not what it is: but when a man once understands what the death of Christ is, you cannot after that take it away from him. "He magnified himself even to the prince of the host", the prince "of princes," it says further on in this chapter. Now, shall I try to set before you what the death of Christ was in the estimation of the apostle Paul, and what the consequences were that followed from that death? This belongs to my subject, for we have included in this vision the death of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ by that tyrannical power that was to rise. And if we can feel that we are one with the Apostle, that we have the same knowledge in kind, though not the same in degree, that he had; if we are thus holding the same truth, though with only a little knowledge, and a grain of faith, and a trembling hope, then we are included in the happy number he addresses when he says, "You are all partakers of my grace." And you know the grace of which he was partaker. It was no shillyshally grace; it was grace that brought him down when he was Saul of Tarsus; it was grace that made him a Christian, and he well knew it, and therefore was not ashamed to own, "by the grace of God I am what I am." Let us hear, then, how he handles the great subject of the death of Christ, which is the center mystery of this vision. He goes in a way that we should be alarmed at if we heard a minister so go on if we had not Bible authority for it; we should jump up and take our hats, or else go off without them, and run out of the place. Well, let us hear it nevertheless, dreadful as it is. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up, for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Very well. Then you receive God's own Son as delivered up for your sins? Yes. As delivered up to the sword of justice? Yes. And you receive God's Dear Son as having by his one offering perfected forever all them that are sanctified? Yes. Well, he goes on, and he says, "Who shall lay anything" that is past, or that is present, or that is to come; for he includes in that paragraph all the three tenses; "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Christ is received in his eternal perfection, and who shall lay anything to the charge of that man? Why, the voice of that man's sins against him is but a whisper out of the dust in comparison of the thunders of the atonement on his behalf. The eloquence of that great fact shall silence every voice against the saints, not a dog shall be able to move his tongue against any of the true spiritual children of Israel. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" We lay a thousand things to our own charge, and some of our brethren and sisters sometimes are very eager to blame us; that is their infirmity; they have done so, and do so, and will do so; never mind, we must bear it as easily as we can. And the world will blame us, and there is one whose meat and whose drink it is to blame us, namely, Satan; he is the accuser of the brethren. But "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Now hear the apostle argue it out. "It is God that justifies. Who, is he that condemns? It is Christ that died;" as though he should say, If you can point to one sin that did not die with his death, I give up the point; if you can point to one stain that his death did not take out; if you can point to one spot of leprosy which his death did not heal; if you can prove that the church shall at the last have some spot, some wrinkle, some blemish left, I will give up the point. "I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it;" and yet to understand it is to understand everything. The apostle does not stop there; "Yes rather, that is risen again;" as though he should say, Mind, Jesus has not died, and left his death for me to improve, (as the cant phrase is), by a funeral sermon; no, he is risen from the dead, what for? To carry into effect the victory he has wrought. What is said upon this? That his people rise with him, legally, and "Because I live, you shall live also." "Who is even at the right hand of God;" better still. Ah, says one, now I see what kind of a Jesus Christ it is that is exalted; it is a Jesus Christ that has by his one offering so perfected all of them for whom he died that nothing can be laid to the charge of God's elect; it is God that justifies. God that justifies the people from all things, past, present and to come, by what the Savior has done. Why, say you, does God exalt such a Christ as this? Yes, not a duty-faith

Christ, not a free-will Christ, not a Puseyite Christ, not a Roman Catholic Christ, nor a Socinian Christ, but the Christ of God. That is the Christ that he has exalted; and if you are not poor enough to receive a Jesus Christ, by whom it is impossible for anything to be laid to your charge, you are not savingly converted. It is God that justifies from all things, will not behold iniquity nor see perverseness; that will dwell with you, and you shall dwell with him, in spite of your sin, the devil, hell, and all that may stand in the way. "Who also makes intercession for us." What more? The apostle well knew what more. He saw Satan and his parsons coming up out of the bog. What are you come to do? Well, Paul, it is all very well Jesus Christ has died, and God justifies, and we don't know what all; but still we may lose it all; at least you know we may be Christians today and not Christians tomorrow. Very well, he says, who shall do that? "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Well, says Satan, you know there is tribulation, and I will take care you have some persecution; and famine too, if I can get you into it; and peril too, if I can get you into it; and nakedness too; you shall not have a rag to your back if I can help it; and the sword too, if I can cut you down with it. What of that? It is written, "For your sake we are killed all the day long." Ah, says Satan, that is what I told you. Ah, but stop, Just hear me "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us, for I am persuaded that neither death" that is what we all dread at times, "nor life," and that is what we all dread at times, "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." What further back is called the love of Christ is here called the love of God; so, that the love of Christ and the love of God are one: "I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." I like to understand the history of it. Some young people say, Ah, but I like the intellectual, sir. Well, be as literary as you like, be as learned as you like; the more so the better, if you don't make a fool of yourself. But there is a great deal more what may be called intellectual food in the Bible than some are aware of. It is a book that has made a great many fools wise, even intellectually; it is a wonderful book in every way. But keeping to my subject, we see, then, the view which the apostle took of the saints.

Now the people of God are called in this chapter stars; "It cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground and stamped upon them." I just name the stars for the sake of noticing a scripture where the people of God are called stars; and we will take the Lord's comment upon that subject, the same as we have taken the apostles comment upon the death of Jesus Christ, Isaiah 40 "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these," things it there said; but the word things is not in the original, and I think ought not to be there: "who has created these shining stars," a literal allusion to the stars; "that brings out their host by number he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in his power, not one fails." The reason that the people of God are called stars is very simple, plain, and straightforward. Jesus Christ is the Bright and Morning Star; and because he is called by that name, to denote their likeness to him, they are also called by that name. And one of the main ideas conveyed is sons of light. Jesus Christ is that Day Star that shone into a dark place when it shone into our souls; and our souls are often a dark place now in a way of trouble, but a little light from Jesus puts us right. So, then they are called stars, the morning stars that sang together, the sons of God that shall shout for joy, because Jesus Christ himself is called a Star. Jesus Christ was crucified, this Bright and Morning Star was cast to the ground. And some of the martyrs in their bitterest sufferings recognized their likeness to Christ in this, and glorified Christ in being trodden down as he was, in being stamped upon as he was. Hence, if Peter, who was one of these stars, should be trodden down, yet thereby he should glorify

God. "Not one fails." Jesus Christ is safe, and they are safe. You may bark at the stars, and throw stones at them, and get very angry with them, but you cannot move them; and "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed but abides forever." And yet these people that thus know the truth, and are made free thereby, are sometimes very much cast down; and the Lord comments upon it. "Why say you O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord?" Why, Jesus Christ is your way; he was never hid from the Lord; and the way you have to go experimentally and providentially is not hid from him; he knows it all. "And my judgment is passed over from my God." No, it is not. You love my name, and you love me, and you will be judged as a friend. "Have you not known, have you not heard?" and the Lord goes on to speak of his eternal power to bear up his people under all their discouragements. There is one more point I must name, and that is that the enemy cast the truth down to the ground. How many inquiries there have been in the world, "What is truth?" I will give the old definition, let it once more go into print, there it is in Ephesians 1. The apostle there tells us what truth is, that is, gospel truth. "in whom you also trusted" that is, in Christ, "after that you heard the word of truth;" then he defines what that word is, "the gospel of your salvation." Then in the second chapter he says, "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." There, then, is the truth; and I would ask this assembly is not this the truth that the adversary in all ages has tried to cast down, and to put anything and everything in the place thereof? To stand out for God's eternal truth, and at the same time to stand well with the world is utterly impossible.