

THE RIGHT PERFECTION

A SERMON

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“But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1:4

Our sermon last Sunday morning on these words closed with observing “that the people of God have a fourfold perfection, and that patience is to have its perfect work in all the respects we then described, to the end that they may be found at last in this perfection. The fourfold perfection, we observed, they have is first perfection of kind; that is to say, they are sincere and real in their religion. “When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Secondly, that they are perfect in their decision for God. Those that are established in the truth have ceased to waver; they have ceased to be tossed about with every wind of doctrine, their hearts become established in grace; and every day’s experience proves to them that it must be all of grace, and so they take their stand, and are enabled at times to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Then the third respect; in which they have perfection is that perfection they have in Christ. That perfection they receive in the testimony and enjoyment of it to a certain degree while travelling through the wilderness. And then fourthly, their prospective perfection; that is to say, at the last great day, when that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect shall come.

There are three things I wish this morning, the Lord enabling me profitably to us and glorifying to his name, to dwell upon. First, *the perfection we have in Christ*. Secondly, *the entirety of the Christian*. Thirdly, *the complete supply of all his needs*; “that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

First, *the perfection we have in Christ*. I could not very well pass away from the text without dwelling upon this, because that perfection we have in Christ is such a life-giving truth, it is such a sin-pardoning truth, it is such a liberating truth, it is such a joyful truth, it is such a stable truth, it is such a reconciling truth; it reconciles us not only to God, but it reconciles us to our lot by the way. For while we feel that we are compassed with infirmities, and can find perfection nowhere but in Christ Jesus, it is our rejoicing to think that that perfection can never be sullied, that that perfection can never wither, that that perfection can never be lost. Well might the apostle say, “Warning every man” that is, every one that made a profession of the Savior’s name, to whom he was writing; he did not mean those general, vague, and false doctrine warnings in which men so largely deal; he was then writing to the professed people of God; “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man” that is, every one of these said men who

were effectually warned, and who were taught in the wisdom of mediation, for therein centers all the wisdom that we need, for “in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” And as we are creatures of circumstance, and can get at eternal things sometimes better by contrast, I will first contrast the dear Savior’s perfection with the four things that are said in Daniel 5, respecting Belshazzar. Let us contrast the four things said of him with the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to get at more clearly this delightful truth of perfection in him; remembering that it is by perfection in in him that we stand without fault before the lofty and burning throne of the everlasting God. First then, it is said of Belshazzar that his kingdom was numbered and finished. I apprehend it means that the days were numbered, that the days were few, that his kingdom was soon to be ended. Now see here the contrast. What was announced by the angel Gabriel (and the angel Gabriel seems to have been honored with a large acquaintance with the person and work of Christ; it was the same angel that 600 years before that, in Daniel 9, announced the Messiahship of the Savior, in that wonderful description there given of the termination of all evil, and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, freeing us from condemnation;) what was announced by the angel Gabriel to Mary concerning Jesus? That he should reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there should be no end. What an opening up, then, is this! Here is a King that never dies, and here is a kingdom that can never, no, never be moved. I like the words,

“Once in Christ, in Christ forever;
Thus the eternal covenant stands.”

So, bless the Lord, whatever may terminate, the love of God will never terminate; whatever may come to naught, electing grace will never come to naught; whatever may come to naught, the perfection we have in Christ will never come to naught; whatever may come to naught, as this world and all that is in it must come to naught, the kingdom of Jesus never shall. His indeed is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion throughout all generations. Here, then, is the perfection. But again, it is said of Belshazzar that he was weighed in the balances and found wanting. Now it is written in another place that “a false balance is abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is his delight.” And happy is that man that can fall down before God and say, Lord, I feel and see that I am a false balance; were I to attempt to put all my supposed righteousness, and goodness, and resolutions, and doings in the one scale and attempt to make matters right and equal in that way, I see that I should not need all my sins, I should need only one of my sins to outweigh all my doings. Therefore, Lord, I am that false balance, and I must be an abomination unto you: I am an abomination to your holiness, your justice, and your integrity, and there is a total antagonism between your very nature and my nature as a sinner. “But a just weight is his delight.” The blessed Redeemer comes in; let his precious person and work be put into one scale, and my sins into the other, oh how he outweighs them all. Is his atonement found wanting? Is his righteousness found wanting? Is his person found wanting? Is his love found wanting? Are any of the attributes of his wonderful person found wanting? No. There our sins are outweighed just weight is the Lord’s delight, so the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s delight. Perhaps you will say, Well, but did he take me into this balance with him, do you think? Well, suppose he did; what do you think your weight is? If you go to Psalm 62:9, you will there just ascertain your own weight and value. It there says, “Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree,” in self-righteousness and self-goodness, like the Pharisee, “are a lie” so the publican was vanity, and the Pharisee a big lie; “to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.” So then we weigh nothing, but of

the people there was none with him. But when the blessed Redeemer appears, oh how my soul has many times rejoiced to see my sins outweighed by his atonement, by his righteousness, by his name, and that this just weight is Jehovah's eternal delight. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And I am not sure that the prophet Isaiah is not treating upon this same subject, though I am aware that the first and primary objects of that sublime language which Isaiah uses in his 40th chapter are to contrast the greatness of God with the littleness of man, and secondly, to contrast the greatness of God with the paltriness of the images and false gods that were made by men; but while this appears to be the primary object of the prophet, it strikes me that there is something that seems to carry our attention to Christ's mediation. "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?" We know it is not uncommon in the Holy Scriptures for God's wrath to be compared to floods and mighty torrents, and that Christ measured these in his hand, and that he rolled these mighty torrents back, and thus has divided the sea, the waters of the great deep, and made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over, and to make them go over dry shod everyone understands that expression, having access to God as though there was no wrath, the wrath is so completely passed away. Make them to go over dry shod; it is a very plain expression; but it is a very sweet thought. If there could be one drop of wrath in your path, it would stop you. But he has dried up these waters, hid them as it were in the hollow of his hand, the hand of his almighty power. "And meted out heaven with the span." Does not this mean that he could grasp all that the law demanded? The demands of the law were mighty, but he could grasp the whole. He has meted out heaven with the span; and having meted out, measured what there was to do, he came and did it. I shall not speak wrongly when I say that Christ's work was a measured work; it was measured and weighed; and so, he came and did that which was measured out for him to do. "And comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure." May not this dust of the earth refer to the whole election of grace? Is it an uncommon thing in the Holy Scriptures to speak of us thus "He remembers our frame, that we are dust." And again, "I, who am but dust and ashes" Everyone of us is brought to feel what a poor creature he is. But Jesus has comprehended the whole in the measurement of his work. And what has he done? What shall I say to this? Why, he has "comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure;" in the measure of his mediatorial work. And what has he done by this? First, he has rolled away the waters of wrath, so that there is no more curse; secondly, he has grasped all the demands of the law, and met those demands; thirdly, he has comprehended the dust of the earth, all his people, in a measure; and by so doing he has immortalized mortality; he has uncorruptionized (if I might coin the word), corruption; he has turned death into life, he has turned dying me into living saints, he has turned poor beggars of the dust and of the dunghill into kings and priests to God. Oh, the mighty change wrought in men's condition by the Savior comprehending them in his wonderful work. My hearer, did you ever so think of the mediatorial work of Christ? Did you ever so meditate upon that truth, or ever hear any minister so speak of it, as though you could feel, as it, were, the Lord coming to you and embracing you, and taking you up in your very soul by that mediatorial work, and, if I may use such a phrase, it is sacred language, at which the ungodly and the carnal may sneer, but it is the language of God's word, taking you up thus, as it were and kissing your soul out of all its sorrows and troubles? "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," Ah, there are some such experiences in the church of the blessed God. The poet is right when he says, concerning this revelation of the blessed God,

"Here he smiles, and smiles forever,
May my soul such grace record."

He has comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure.” And does not the next clause refer to our sins? “he has weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.” He knew the weight of every one of our mountainous sins. Ah, there I will grant we were heavy enough; there I will grant we were heavier than the sands of the seashore; there I will grant we were weighty; there I will grant that Emmanuel took a weight upon him that must have broken the world down, and did make the globe tremble, and did rend the rocks, and did darken the sky, and did tear on one side the ceremonial law, rent the veil from top to bottom; as much as to say, Stand aside; you have been now for 1,500 years, but not one sin could you atone for; all that you could do was to point to the coming Messiah. I am that Messiah. Ceremonial law, stand aside; Aaron, stand aside; Moses, stand aside; Jewish temple, stand aside; all stand aside; Christ now shall be all and in all; he shall be the temple, the altar, the sacrifice, the priest, the king, the infinite, the eternal all. “He weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance,” and he alone. He is the only person that ever did experimentally know, or ever will know, the weight of these mountains, the weight of sin. What makes sin so weighty against the sinner? God’s law, God’s infallible law, God’s eternal law, having in it all the strength of his legislative authority. “He weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance,” and found he could outweigh them all, found they were none too heavy for him, he could manage the whole, that he could go down to the bottoms of these mountains, overturn them by the roots, rise triumphant from the dead, and establish a spiritual and eternal level, wherein God and man should stand righteously together, “My foot stands in an even place,” brought up into this spiritual level by the perfection that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. “Let patience have her perfect work.” Who would give up such a gospel as this? Who would give up patience with such a gospel as this, with such a hope as this? Patience then may have a great deal to do; never mind, let her have her perfect work; never give up; hold fast, that you may be found at last in this triumphant perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Was he found wanting then? No but happy is the man that has found out that he, the man, is so far wanting that Christ alone can be the remedy.

Let us now hear a little account of ourselves, what very weighty, important creatures we are. Now comes the Holy Spirit. Well, what are the nations? “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small,” impalpable “dust of the balance.” You weigh your goods, and you wipe the scales, yet there are some little particles of dust left that you cannot see. Now mark, it is the *small* dust of the balance; and then it is added, “behold, he takes up the isles as a very little thing.” The Hebrew word, translated “little thing,” there means an atom; so that you must take the small dust of the balance, and then take one of these atoms, which you need a microscope, perhaps, to see; such are the nations in the omnipotent hand of the eternal God: “a very little thing.” “All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity.” As the Lord lives, my experience is clear upon this, that spiritually I am nothing, and less than nothing; or, if we can understand it more plainly, worse than nothing; for nothing would not get in the way as I have got in the way; nothing ever stood so much in the way of my salvation as I have myself. Well might the apostle say, “Where then is boasting? It is excluded!” I should think it was. “By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.” The blessed God gives us that faith that unites us to the eternal perfection of Christ; and we find a Savior that is not found wanting, and as we have perfection in him, we shall not be found wanting in him. What a sweet, scene of things, to view the Savior as thus outweighing all our sins. I am speaking to some that have been rolled about, and knocked about, and driven about, I don’t know where since you were born; and yet if you are brought to know your need of this Jesus Christ, and have a grain of faith in your heart to receive him, that will prove that all your sins were taken by him, that he outweighed the whole,

that they are everlastingly put away, to be heard of, to be looked at, to be thought of, to be seen, no more forever; “The Egyptians whom you have seen today you shall see no more forever.” If our experience does not lead us to make much of Christ’s perfection, it will not lead us to make much of God and if it does not lead us to make much of God, we shall not make much of heaven; and if we do not make much of Christ and God, and heaven, we shall make much of something else, and then that will prove that that something else, after all, is our God. The kingdom of God first, this perfection first, a remedy for everything. Here then is a perfection of duration, and a perfection of weight, in worth and worthiness, in him.

Thirdly, it is said of Belshazzar that his kingdom was divided. What is, said of the kingdom of our King? Ezekiel 37: what is there said has been done, still exists, and will exist to eternity. It is a scripture very much in favor of high doctrine people, “I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel;” based upon the eternal transactions of the eternal God, his love and choice, the mediation of Christ, and the promises, called mountains, because they are elevating and lift us up out of Satan’s regions, out of Satan’s reach, and out of harm’s way “And one king” whereas the Israelites had many kings, a long succession of kings, “one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations:” the first Israel was divided into two nations; Jeroboam went away with one, and Rehoboam with the other; but these new covenant people shall be made one nation, grasped in eternal choice, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. What was it that severed the Jewish nation into two? Sin. How is it that this new covenant nation cannot be severed into two? Because there is no sin; Christ has put away sin; it is a holy nation, a peculiar people, to show forth not their own praises, for they have none to show, but to show forth the praises of him that has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. “Neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.” No; it is a kingdom that cannot be moved; there they are, fixed, grounded, settled. “I will settle you,” says the Lord, “after your old estates, no modern, new-fangled doctrines, but “I will settle you after your old estates,” which I settled upon you before the world was, which I will settle upon you while the world is, and which you shall enjoy when the world is no more. Then the Lord goes on to explain the matter. “Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, because they are brought to receive this covenant God, to the exclusion of all others “nor with their detestable things;” but this covenant God becomes their all and in all; “nor with any of their transgressions,” because Jesus Christ has taken them all away, they are gone, they are cast behind his back, buried in the depths of the sea, blotted out, forgiven, forgotten; live they cannot, die they must; die the people cannot anymore; live to eternity they must. “I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned. They have sinned in the first Adam, and in the law, and themselves, and in the world; I will save them from the first Adam, from the law, from self, from the world, from all these places, and will bring them into oneness with Christ Jesus; there they abide, and the wicked one touches them not. “And I will cleanse them;” I will do it, notice that; it is God’s work; “so shall they be my people, and I will be their God;” “they *shall* be my people;” no hesitation about it. Belshazzar’s kingdom, then, was divided; Christ’s kingdom can never be divided; there is nothing can sever it. What was it that severed Adam and Eve? Sin came in; and the man and his wife, after a few years, had to separate by death. Death is the wages of sin. But shall sin separate the Lamb and his bride? He has put away the sin of his bride; she comes up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved; and he will appear at the last great day triumphant with her by his side. “Upon your right hand did stand the Queen in gold of Ophir.” She shall be presented without fault or wrinkle, or blemish, or any such thing. The more you are enabled to enter into the spirit of this perfection that is in Christ, the

happier it will make you; the more it will overcome and kill some of your hard thoughts of God. Why, if the Lord dealt with us according to our state as sinners, we might say, Truly the Lord could not think of anything too bad for us, such sinners as we are; he could not think of anything too bad for us here, while we are in this world or in the next. But so infinite is the change, that now he does not think anything too good for us; so great is his love, he does not think anything too good for us; he did not think his dear Son too good for us; he did not think the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel too good for us; no, the great God did not think himself too good for us, because of the great love wherewith he loved us. He has therefore made us heirs, nothing short of himself, joint heirs with Christ Jesus.

Then, fourthly, it is said of Belshazzar that his kingdom was given to the Medes and Persians. Let us hear, in contrast to this, what is said of the kingdom of our King in Daniel 2. "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom," which he did. Christ established his reign, that is, by what he did in his humiliation he is entitled to his exaltation. "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God", in justice to him, in faithfulness to him, "has highly exalted him, and has given him a name above every name that's named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come." And this kingdom shall never be destroyed. Now Belshazzar's kingdom was given to the Medes and Persians, but this kingdom of Christ can never be destroyed; it shall never be given to other people. The literal kingdom was taken away from the Jews, but this spiritual eternal kingdom shall never be taken away from the saints of God; they are citizens for ever, they are subjects of the kingdom forever. Wherefore," said the apostle, "we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear." And this kingdom, so far from being given away, shall consume all other kingdoms; so that the subjects of this kingdom shall live and reign when all other kingdoms are as the chaff of the summer threshing floor. "For as much as thou saw," said Daniel, "that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands;" "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise," "and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold;" Ah, says one, I should not mind so much about the iron and the brass, and the clay, but the silver rather hurts me, and then the gold! What, is gold no use to me in this kingdom? No, for "you are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." The Lord will break all in pieces, the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the whole shall be as nothing, and all your confidence shall be in him. And I do not know whether Daniel was in the habit of nodding his head or not, but I sometimes fancy he gave a significant nod in winding this subject up; for he says, "The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." He knew that he was as certain in the interpretation as he was in the dream itself. And when I can take a text and feel as sure of the interpretation as of the text itself, then I am satisfied. "The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." And so, it was. Six hundred years afterwards, by the appearing of the Savior, the dream came into operation, and all has been accomplished. His kingdom still reigns, still grows, and his name shall still be exalted. The kingdom shall not be given to other people. In the old covenant, there was a divorce court, by which the wife, the Jewish nation, had not to be put away for any wrong on the part of the husband, for she herself never liked her husband; she said, I am married to him, but I do not like him; and so she was always after other gods; therefore the Lord wrote a bill of divorcement against her. But here in the new covenant, the Lamb's bride is made by the grace of God to look forth as the morning, and as soon as ever he appears as the morning, Ah, she says, I do love him; "Tell me, you, whom my soul loves, where you feed," where you do

appear and strengthen your children, “for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of your companions?” She is fair as the moon, by the light that he sheds upon her; clear as the sun, by the perfection that is in him; terrible as an army with banners. She will do him good and not evil, all the days of her life; and when he hides his face, and is absent, and the little ones say, “What is your beloved?” she will set to out of the abundance of her heart and give a good account of her husband when he is away, as well as when he is there. He will never treat her unkindly, and she will never be unkind to him. There is a perfection of agreement, and shall be to all eternity. Ah, say you, I suppose they are well suited to each other. Well, friends, an empty sinner is well suited to a full Christ; a lost sinner is well suited to a Savior; a poor guilty sinner is well suited to this pardoning mercy, and the poor leprous sinner is well suited to the fountain that is opened for sin and for uncleanness. Such, then, is the perfection we have in Christ.

Secondly, *the entirety of the Christian*; “that you may be entire.” This is evidently in part a repetition of the preceding clause; that you may be really decided, given up entirely to God, without a single drawback whatever. Well, say some, are you? I am, sir, yes, that is my answer; but not to such a God as is represented by men, but to such a God as is represented by the Son of God; to such a God as is represented in the covenant ordered in all things and sure. There I can say,

“You have my heart it shall be yours;
Yours it shall ever be.”

Mercy forgive the man, grace forgive the man, God of heaven and earth forgive the man that has so misunderstood the doctrine of back-sliding as to bring it into the new covenant, and into the work of the Holy Spirit. The children of God do what they call backslide, but they are wrong in their interpretation. “If any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” Forty-three long years has my soul been united to God’s truth; from that truth I have never found in my heart a desire to draw back, to depart from it. I have trembled lest I should, or lest God should send me away; but I have no desire to go away nor to give it up. “Will you also go away? Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” “Entire,” then, carries the idea of being entirely given up to God in his eternal truth; and then, whatever may offer itself, you do not want it. The aged clergyman at Rome, called the Pope, you do not want anything of him. I think I can keep that commandment, come, let us go on with the law for a minute or two, “You shall not covet anything that is his.” Well, I really do not covet anything of his. I am entire as I stand in Christ; I desire nothing else.

But lastly, *the complete supply of all the Christian’s needs*; “wanting nothing.” The profane man, the wicked man, clearly proves by his works that he wants nothing, not seriously, that is in Christ. He means to go on without God and godliness. Then if we come to professors, oh, what numbers of professors are there that want very little gospel; indeed, the less gospel the better. I am sure in the sermons that are preached, and the congregations that hear them, in most cases an account of the work of God in the soul, of that soul being shut up in prison, of its being brought out, into the liberty of the gospel, an account of the perfection that is in Christ, why, it is quite out of fashion. But they would listen ten hours to the wonderful things that they have done with their Sunday schools, and tracts, and one thing and the other. Thus, these ministers will entertain you; and if you look for something else, they will say, Oh, you are an enemy to good works. How is it that these feasible things are brought in? Because they are not conscious that they need anything else.

Therefore, I will close with the words of the Lord upon this matter, and may they be instructive and profitable to us all. The Lord said of the Laodicean church that they were neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. They were lukewarm towards the Lord Jesus Christ by the truth; did not know their need of him; lukewarm towards God in covenant, did not know their need of him; lukewarm towards God in the exceeding great and precious promises of his holy word and his eternal reign of mercy. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would you wert cold or hot. So then because you are neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" that is your account of yourself. What is your real condition? "You know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" you stand naked before God in your sins. Still there were some among them that had life in the soul, but were corrupted by others. It is wonderful what mischief one enemy will do in a congregation, by their example, by their insinuations. If I thought there were any of that stamp here, I would say to them that the greatest service they could render to me and to the cause would be to leave the place, and never come here again, unless God should be pleased to change their hearts. Well, then, there were some that had life in the soul, but were corrupted by others, and became lukewarm and careless. And to these the Lord now speaks; he saw their hearts were right, though they were somewhat neutralized and frozen by the icicle spirit of the others. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten;" I will bring you out of that: "be zealous therefore, and repent. I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich, and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me." And then comes the man that will want nothing. "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame" and he overcame by his own personal excellency.