

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

A SERMON

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“Where is the Lord God of Elijah.” 2 Kings 2:14

I CLOSED my discourse upon these words last Lord's day morning chiefly upon the greatness of the confidence Elijah had in God when he saw that the sacrifice and its accompaniments were accepted, as a type of that confidence which the people of God are to have in God, in proportion as they see what Jesus Christ is; for the more we know of him, the more confidence we shall have in him who so loved us as to send us such a Savior; so that there and then, without the least sign beyond the sacrificial sign, Elijah said, “There is a sound of abundance of rain.” And you will observe that the blessing was to come by the good pleasure of God, in entire accordance with the sacrifice being accepted entirely of the Lord. And then we see that Elijah persevered in prayer. So now it is a part of Gods order of things, and he will make you feel that a thing that's not worth asking for is not worth having; and if it is not worth seeking for in your estimation, it is not worth having; but if you cry for it and dig for it, as it were, as of necessity, seeking the Lord by Christ Jesus, then you will not seek in vain. And presently there appears a cloud like a man's hand, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, the God man mediator; and the appearance of such a cloud as this at once confirmed the confidence of Elijah. And the cloud appeared like a man's hand to show that not only has Jesus Christ atoned for sin, not only has he abolished death, not only has he put away the curse of the law, not only has he wrought victory, but it is by him that the blessings come. We live in a day when some hold a doctrine something like this; Jesus Christ has died, but the blessings are to come by your doing your part, and by something done by the creature. Hence, look at the ceremonies that men have invented, and think the blessings are to come to them by those ceremonies; whereas the same person that died for us brings the blessings to us; the same person that had died on Calvary's cross, the same person that rose again lifted up his hands and blessed the disciples; and the testimony was left that he should come again in like manner. So then, as Jesus Christ has thus wrought the wonderful work, so all the blessings are to come by him. And how sweet that scripture is upon this! it seems to me to sweep away every human doctrine and human invention, that “he has blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.” So that it is not one person to put away our sin and another person bring the blessing; the Lord himself, the same person who in his humiliation put away our sin, does in his exaltation give repentance to Israel and remission of sins.

In closing my remarks upon this subject, I have four more points to notice. First, the abundance of rain, *what is spiritually meant by the rain?* Secondly, *the place from which Elijah went when he left this world.* Thirdly, *his manner of going to heaven.* Fourthly, *the inquiry;* “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?”

First, *what is meant by the rain?* Suffice it to say that the very first feature of the rain means the gentleness of the Lord's dealings with his people, the gentleness and carefulness of the Lord's dealings with his people. Because the rain in this sense does not mean anything destructive, but just the reverse. You will see in what a variety of ways the Lord is pleased to speak of his mercy, of his kindness, and the gentleness of his dealings under the figure of rain. And you that are Christians also like the figure very much; you like this representation because it accords so nicely with the gospel, and with your experience. None but the Lord himself has command over the rain; none but the Lord himself can send the genial shower. And so, he makes us feel that we have no dominion. that all power belongs unto God; and we therefore are to ask of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; and we live in the time of the latter rain. The former rain of the Old Testament dispensation is gone, and yet not gone, because the Old Testament continues a blessing to us. And it is said the Lord shall make them bright clouds and send unto every one grass in the field. And you will observe it is a figure applied to the Eternal Three; let us trace it out keeping up the idea that it means the kind, gentle dealings of the Lord with his people. I should like, if the Lord's will, before I die to preach you, many of you at least, into a better apprehension of your covenant God. I am afraid some of you live a life in great part of slavish fear of him, as though he was rather a dread than an endearment; as though you were carrying with you, from time to time, a kind of foreboding that God, on account of what you feel you are, would someday cut you down. Now this is the spirit of bondage, and all for want of a greater acquaintance with him who has said. “if the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed.” And then there must be, in order to have a right knowledge of these things, solemn experience. Now first, then, it is expressive of the kind and gentle dealings with us of God the Father; 6th of Hosea, where it is said, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord,” Where does this proposition originate? Let us go to the Lord, let us look to him, for we need something that he alone can minister to us. Happy that man who is brought to feel that he needs that pardon and that mercy which the God of heaven and earth alone can minister to him. But how came they to make this proposition? Why. “He has torn, and he will heal us, he has smitten, and he will bind us up.” What has he torn? Why, he has torn our conceits all to pieces, he has torn our false confidence all to pieces, he has torn our false refuge all to pieces, he has torn a thousand of our earthly hopes all to pieces. And how has he smitten? By convincing us of what we are in our hearts, in our nature; thereby we are smitten down and fall down before him. And were it not that we have the privilege of praying in the language of the publican when we are thus smitten down, we should have no hope of ever getting up again; but there we may pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Satan may come in and say, Well, but you are nothing but a sinner; how can you cry for mercy? You are nothing but a sinner and you are confessing before the Great Judge of all, that you are nothing but a sinner. Now if you were like that good man that fasts twice a week, and gives tithes of all he possesses, and if you were not such a sinner, you might expect favor; but you are nothing but a sinner. But by and by it come out that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and this poor believing sinner went down to his house justified, while the other that did not know he was a sinner, and therefore was not a believer in Christ nor in God's mercy, he did not go down to his house justified. And now notice; “After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up.” Let us be careful here; for if we have not come by our religion in the right

way, we shall have to part with it someday, and just the time we shall want it most. "After two days will he revive us." Now do we know what it is to be cast down, to be cut up, and to feel our need of the Lord's power to give us such a revelation of the death and resurrection of Christ as to revive us? For notice the way in which the revival is to be. "After two days he will revive us; in the third day he will raise us up;" that is, by the death and resurrection of Christ. And when you see that Jesus Christ is risen as a morning without clouds, when you see how completely he has put sin away, how completely he is suited to you, how will that revive you. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Here must still be a following on. Religion is a daily and a momentary thing. I do not hold with the doctrines of the Wesleyans, at least, not with some of them. You know their common saying is, "We live from moment to moment," and that is right enough, not in their sense of the word, but in the true, spiritual and sure sense of the word, we know not where or when we shall die, whether suddenly, or at home, or abroad, or how or where; therefore, our religion must be a personal matter. Then shall we know, and if our religion be real, we shall follow on to know the Lord. And though I have to preach three times today, I hope when I close the services this evening that some of you will be wiser than you are this morning; and that some of you will be better in your hearts and souls for what you have heard; and that some of you will be strengthened still to go on to seek the Lord; for "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord, his going forth is prepared as the morning;" the resurrection of Christ. Again, 2 Samuel 23, Christ is the morning without clouds; and according to the clearness of Christ our God is prepared to go forth; he is prepared to go forth and pardon every sin, he is prepared to go forth and wash the blackest clean; he is prepared to go forth and save sinners east, west, north, south. And now mark, "he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Here is the gentleness of his dealings; here is God our Father. Will he hurt you when he comes to you? It is true he will sometimes, in order to prepare you for those gentle dealings with you, deal a little roughly with you. There is the wind that rends the mountains, and Elijah is very much alarmed at it; but, Elijah, I am not going to hurt you; that rough wind is gone; I have sent that adversity to you just to prepare you for something that is to abide with you. And then there was the fire, and that alarmed him too. Why, I shall be consumed. Oh no, Elijah; I have only shown you the fire in order to let you know that I might justly consume you, but I will not consume you. And so, the Lord was not in the fire. I do not intend to dwell there, Elijah, I do not intend you shall dwell there. And then came an earthquake, swallowing up everything, and Elijah was alarmed again. Well, Elijah, I have shown you this in order to show you that the pit of hell might open its mouth and swallow you up; but I shall not dwell with you there, Elijah, for God in his vengeance does dwell with devils in hell in that sense, breathing eternal indignation. So, the earthquake is gone, and now comes the still small voice; here comes the gentle shower; here comes the gentle dealing. "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him; he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." But that mercy that has been coming towards us from eternity will abide with us through time, will make our bed in sickness, and will accompany us in the lofty regions of glory. and that to endless ages. "A sound of abundance of rain," God the Father blessing us abundantly, dealing with us gently. Then again, it is applied to the dear Savior also in the 72nd Psalm. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass." There is the poor sinner cut down, and there is the mown grass trying to grow again: the poor sinner is brought down very low. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth." Have there not been times when the dear Savior's name has refreshed us? when we have thought, Ah! in thinking of him I forget all my

toils, I forget all my sins, all my sorrows, all my fears; I forget everything. "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." Here are the gentle dealings of the dear Savior. And then thirdly, it is applied also to the Holy Spirit, 44th of Isaiah, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground;" then comes the explanation, "I will pour my Spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring." Have you not marked, brethren, the contrast running through the Scriptures, that when the Lord appears in the law he appears under the figure of terrible fire, as at Sinai, and of the lake that burns? But when he appears in the gospel, he appears in a paradisiacal form, where he is unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; for in the city of our God there is not fire, but a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God. Then, fourthly, it is also applied to the gospel, 32nd of Deuteronomy: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herbs, and as the flowers upon the grass;" and you know what that doctrine is as there described, namely, the greatness of the Lord's name, the perfection of his work, the stability of Christ. Ah, if persons that speak lightly of what they call high doctrines knew of them what my soul knows of them, they would never open their mouths in future concerning them except to extol them, except to speak of them in the highest possible terms; for what are what men call high doctrines but simply the testimonies of God's love to man, the testimonies of God's mercy to man, expressive of his gentle dealings with man? And then also this term is applied, fifthly, to the people of God themselves, to show that they are made to know that they are indebted to the sovereign pleasure of God for what they are. Hence you find, in the 5th of Micah, that "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord as the showers upon the grass, that tarry not for man, nor wait for the sons of men." Did the Lord tarry for man when he called Saul of Tarsus? Did the Lord wait for the sons of men when he poured out his Spirit on the Pentecostal day? And did the Lord tarry for man when you first became concerned for eternal things? Did he wait for the sons of men when he had mercy upon your dead, benighted, lost, guilty, rebellious, far off, lost soul. Therefore, you must bear testimony, or fall in with the testimony that it was God, who is rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved you, even when dead in sin. I am afraid I am never able to speak of the sovereignty of God in a way that I could wish; but if you can but see it as essential to your salvation, you will love God in it. All I want you to see here is that, if the Lord had not been pleased to have merry upon you according to his own good pleasure, the Holy Scriptures reveal no other rule by which you could have obtained merry. I will tell you a thought that has very often encouraged me in prayer in private as well as in public, and very much encouraged me to hope in the Lord; when enemies have threatened, and friends have proved false, and afflictions, and trials, and crooks have abounded, I have thought within myself: well, after all, the Lord can do just as he pleases; none of these things can move him; they move me, but they can't move him; they very often confuse and perplex me, but they cannot perplex him; and they seem to upset me, but they cannot upset him: and many times have the words come, "He has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm. and the clouds are the dust of his feet." Ah, my hearer, you can't think what a nice place it is to stay at, the sovereignty of God; that he does as he pleases. It was this that enabled Job to bless the Lord amidst all his privations and afflictions; and it is this that has enabled the people of God from time to time to stand fast as they have. Once get the notion into your head that something can hinder the Lord, then you can no longer have confidence in him; but all the time you carry with you the sweet assurance that however much you are bound, his Spirit is not bound, his Son is not bound, his power is not bound, his counsel is not bound, he does as he pleases, then your confidence in him will be firm. So then, "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people;" notice that, "in the midst of many people," they themselves a few people, "as a dew from

the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarries not for men, nor waits for the sons of man,” and yet great abundance of souls were gathered in the Apostles’ days. So that in this sense also the sacrifice was the sign and sound of abundance of rain. We who are brought to feel ourselves indebted to this eternal mercy, I am sure there is something deficient and at fault somewhere if we are not the most God loving and God-serving people in the world; I do not mean merely the friends of the Surrey Tabernacle, I mean Christians at large, that are brought to feel their need of the sovereignty, of this eternal mercy, of this sacrificial meditation and of the faithfulness of the blessed God. I am sure that if we have a right hold of the same, we shall be increasingly devoted to his dear name, and increasingly rejoice in the goodness of the Lord; as he has said “my people shall be satisfied with my goodness.” Then I need scarcely remind you, sixthly, that this rain means a plenty of everything. “The Lord has given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And you shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that has dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed.”

Can we say, then, that we do know something of being poor, dried up, mortal, dying creatures, and that nothing but these blessings by the sacrifice of Christ, nothing but this mercy of God the Father, nothing but this greatness of the Savior, nothing but this descent of the Holy Spirit softening our hearts and souls, nothing but these blessed testimonies, and nothing but this sovereign pleasure of the blessed God, can be of any use to us? we need pray, for the furtherance of the gospel, and we are favored generally to set the gospel forth pretty clearly; but we can’t give eyes to the blind, and we can’t give life to the dead. I sometimes think of people coming here, perhaps take a sitting, perhaps stop for twelve months, and go away, and as blind when they go away as they were when they came. It seems sometimes to me astonishing how they can hear these things set forth so solemnly, so cuttingly sometimes, and so clearly, and yet go away as blind, and ignorant, and careless as though they had never heard a word. Does it not show, as we observed a Wednesday evening or two ago, that as John gives us to understand, it is as great a miracle for a man to become a Christian as it would be for a flint stone to become a child: “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” And we are all of us by nature as far from anything like being real Christians as the flint stones are from being children. It would indeed be a miracle to turn those flint stones into children, living children, with Hosanna’s on their tongues; but no greater miracle, if as great, than turning a dead sinner into a living soul, opening the blind eyes, and causing that sinner to hunger and thirst after the mercy of God.

Secondly, I notice *the places from which Elijah went when he left this world*. I do not think we ought to pass over them, the places that Elijah went from literally, we must go from mystically; the places that he visited literally, if we are strangers to them mystically, there is something lacking. Now the first place was Gilgal; and what does that mean? There it was the Lord rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off the people. Leave the word “Egypt” out; there the Lord rolled away the reproach. Ah, what is our reproach? Our sin is the reproach, sin is a reproach to any people. Jesus Christ has rolled that reproach away. And the word Gilgal means “rolling,” and it also means “revolution;” one government dethroned, and another government put in its place; that is, Satan dethroned, and the Savior put into his place. Ah, the reproach is rolled away; and now “you shall forget the reproach of your widowhood: for your Maker is your husband.” Now reproach her not but let fall some handfuls for her; now no reproach, no rebuke, no blame; all is taken away.

Do not think of getting to heaven if you do not take this with you. Your testimony would not be acceptable in heaven; you would not be acceptable in heaven if you did not go mystically from this place. You must be brought to see that it is Christ that has rolled the reproach away, has wrought the revolution, overturned the powers of darkness, and brought you into light; and this knowledge prepares you to enter heaven triumphantly, and at once there and then to begin in heaven what you learnt on earth; "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us priests and kings to God, unto him be glory for ever and ever." So then, before you die. the Lord help you to visit this part, to understand this part; it is very significant. Then the second place he went to was Bethel. What is that? There are two things at Bethel. There you get exceeding great and precious promises. "Behold, I am with you in all places." You get the reproach rolled away first, then you get the promises by Christ. "And will keep you in all places." I will never throw you away, Jacob; I will never change you away for another. I might find some better men perhaps, in some respects, but I will never change you away; "I will keep you in all places." So, the Lord never cast him away, and Jacob never cast the truth away. And I am sure the Lord might very easily have got a very much better Christian and minister than I am; but notwithstanding that he does not throw me away, he still keeps me, and I am enabled still to keep him, and we get on very nicely together; at least I love him, and I take that as an evidence he loves me. And "I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of." And Jacob at the last hour testifies. "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." Here, then, is the promise, which the people of God are to believe, understand, and enjoy. But that is not all; there was a ladder that reached from earth to heaven; and the last verse of the 1st chapter of John shows that that ladder mystically is Christ; "Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." That is the way to heaven; Jesus has said, "I am the way." So then if we get the reproach rolled away, and get the promise, why, we shall go on presently and get to heaven as happy as Elijah did. After all, that is the great thing, you know. Of course, you are building, and planting, and marrying, and giving in marriage, and it is all very proper, it is very proper employment, no question of that; but still you will have done with it presently; but these blessed things will never have done with you, and you never will have done with them. Then, thirdly, he went to Jericho. What did he go there for? For two reasons, I think. First, because the Lord wrought a victory there in a very simple way, by the sound of the ram's horns. And you know we plain, pike-staff sort of parsons, as they call us, are called "ram's horn preachers." Well, how was it then that they used ram's horns? that is the question. Why were ram's horns chosen; and why did the Lord put such honor upon them? There is the secret; the horn is the symbol of power. Now, sirs, the ram was reckoned one of the noblest sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation; and therefore, the ram represents Christ in the nobility of his sacrificial character, in the superiority of his sacrificial character; and the horns represent the power by which that atonement shall be sounded out, Jericho's walls shall fall, the devil shall be put to flight, Israel shall gain the victory, God shall have the glory. The ram's horns: the victory of Christ's sacrifice sounded out by his mighty power, and that is a joyful sound. You may have your sounding brass and your tinkling cymbals as long as you like; give me that described in the 89th Psalm, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance. In your name shall they rejoice all the day; and in your righteousness shall they be exalted." Was there another reason why he went to Jericho? Yes, because there the Lord gave a sample of what he has done for me, as though Elijah should say, He saved a sinner; he saved Rahab, originally a harlot, saved her father and her mother, her brothers and her sister's. Amidst the general destruction God took care that not a hair of her head should be

hurt, not a pane of glass in one of her windows should be broken, not a brick, nor a piece of timber, nor a tile, nor a slate, or whatever the house was covered with, should be moved; all should remain immovable. There was the scarlet line, pointing to the scarlet line of God's eternal truth, from "whom he did foreknow" up to eternal glory; and that was the line that was to be the token of her salvation, and saved she was. Therefore, it was that Rahab perished not with them that believed not. So, I will go to Jericho; there my mind will be refreshed with the thought that there is no case too hard for the Lord. And besides, Elijah knew that the time would come when the glorious gospel would go into the Gentile world. And then Elijah would like to go to Jericho, because Rahab was saved there for another reason, namely, that he had not forgotten the same Gentile widow of Sarepta. "The barrel of meal shall not waste," and it did not, "and the cruse of oil shall not fail," and it did not, "till the Lord send rain upon the earth;" and it did not. Presently her son died. There, I thought I was too happy for it to continue; I thought there would be something. I have always found whenever I am happy and comfortable there is sure to be something. "Are you come to call my sin to remembrance?" What sin? Well, my sin in general. No, I am come to call God's goodness to remembrance Well, but my son is dead. Never mind that, never mind it! Well, I have heard you hypers are very hard-hearted, and you certainly are. Let me carry him up into my room. What are you going to do with him, bury him, or what? Ah, you will see. So, he carried her son up, and prayed to the Lord, and her son was raised from the dead. "And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth;" you do not do as some do, turn it into a lie; while it contains free grace, turn it into something contrary to it. So, then she lost nothing by entertaining the prophet; the same as another woman who entertained Elisha, and furnished his room quite as much as a prophet cares about; a table to read upon and eat upon; and a stool, not a chair, lest he should go to sleep; and a candlestick, and a room to himself, all comfortable. Her son died, but the Lord raised him from the dead. What a God our God is; he won't let you do anything for him, but he will give you a reward directly, he will come in and bless you directly: you have done something for me, and I will do something for you. Then Elijah goes to Jordan, where, as we have lately said judgment was arrested; we have been there lately, so I need not enlarge upon it here. Most of our friends seemed to like that subject that morning; it was because it gave you a little hope, was it not? and gave you a little idea that there might be mercy for you after all. Now why does he cross the Jordan? what is that for? You must forgive me if I am a little fanciful. He crossed the Jordan to ascend on the east side of Jordan; that he might ascend on the sunny side, the side where the sun rose. Let me go on the sunny side. Is not that just the way with you when you come to die? Your troubles have two sides to them, a shady side, and a sunny side. Where Christ is not, it is like the dark side of Pharaoh's cloud, very dark; but when you can die where Christ is, that is the sunny side. Ah, he shines upon all our troubles,

"Gilds the whole scene with brighter rays,
And more exalts our joys."

Thus, he was brought to the very point of departure from this world.

Thirdly, *his manner of going to heaven*. There cannot, I think, from the analogy of things, be any doubt whatever but that Elijah, as he ascended to heaven, underwent the same change that the saints that are alive will undergo at the last day. They will undergo in the twinkling of an eye a change from mortality to immortality, from corruption to incorruption, from the earthly to the

heavenly, from the weak to the mighty, and from the merely natural to the spiritual. We cannot doubt that he underwent that change. The Savior himself as he ascended to heaven underwent a change, not from mortality, because he had no mortality; nor from corruption to incorruption, because he had no corruption, and saw no corruption; but he, nevertheless, underwent a change from the natural to the spiritual. We ought not to forget that Jesus Christ was a perfectly natural man; that is, he took human nature in its perfection as human nature; and therefore, hungered, and thirsted, did eat and drink, and was weary, like another man. Now as Christ ascended, he underwent a change from the natural to the spiritual; so that when John saw him on high, no doubt John would say if he could form the contrast amidst the splendors of the glory, Is that the person on whose bosom I leant at the holy Supper? Is that the person whom I so loved and adored? is that the person that was crucified for me? Ah, I cannot now endure the weight of his glory: "I fell at his feet as dead." Yet in his exaltation he was only a pattern of that to which all must be conformed. So, I say, what pledges Enoch and Elijah were that all the people of God at last should be taken up into that glory! though Christ, of course, is the essential and the center pledge of all. Then, secondly, it is said there appeared unto him horses of fire and a chariot of fire. Now anything that is very brilliant and very lively the Scriptures very often compare to fire. Christ's feet are said to be as burnished brass, as if they burned in the furnace. Now what is this chariot? Of course, we must not take it as a literal chariot, or literal horses of fire; but it was a brilliant appearance of God's glory in that shape and form. I think we shall find the key if we go to the 8th verse of the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk; it strikes me the latter part of that verse is the key. "Was your wrath against the sea, that you did ride upon your horses and your chariots of salvation?" There it is ah! it was the chariot of salvation that brought us up from hell; it is the chariot of salvation that carries us through the wilderness; it is the chariot of salvation that will carry us up to heaven at last. When I come to die, it is the chariot of the same salvation wrought at Calvary that will lift me up on high. So, the same salvation that delivered Elijah from evil, carried him through the wilderness, and enabled him to do what he did do, the same chariot, the same salvation, took him to heaven. And Elijah, as every minister should be, was a representative of God's salvation, and so Elisha said, "My father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof."