

SYMPATHY

A SERMON

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“For he that touches you touches the apple of his eye.” Zechariah 2:8

THESE words are given as a reason for what is contained in the preceding part of the verse, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ coming after the glory, which glory we endeavored to set forth last Lord's day morning, that the glory consists in the people, the establishment of the law, of the gospel, and of the service of God, and the bringing about of that ultimate state of things that shall be brought about by the Lord Jesus Christ. There are two doctrines contained in our text, first, *divine sympathy*, “he that touches you touches the apple of His eye;” secondly, *preservation*, for if the people be to him as the apple of his eye, it fairly implies that they shall be carefully preserved.

First, *divine sympathy*. I shall assign three reasons for this sympathy. First, the love wherewith God has loved us. The love of God is a subject into which we cannot very deeply enter. The apostle might well say, “We see through a glass darkly.” When we attempt to speak of the freeness, greatness, eternity, immutability, certainty, or wonderfulness of this love, we seem as though silence would say more than words can express. But still we will say a few words upon it. I cannot speak well, or comfortably to myself, of the love of God apart from the love his people have to him; therefore, the first part of our discourse will embrace those two ideas, God's love to us and our love to him; for if we have not real love to him we cannot very well understand the language of the text. A word, then, upon the love of God. Everyone must see at once what love does, God has embraced the people in a love which he alone is capable of exercising, and his love has in it omnipotence, almighty intensity. He himself declares concerning his doings for the people, expressive of the intensity of his love, “I will plant them in this land with my whole heart and with my whole soul.” It is this free and wonderful love that has made the people dear to him. It is their individual persons that he has made dear to himself. This love is infinite and eternal, and not only endures forever, but is always the same. Is it any wonder, then, that it should be said, “He that touches you touches the apple of his eye?” He has hereby made the people infinitely and eternally dear to him, and always the same. When the fall took place, what did the Lord do? The Savior says, “You have loved them as you have loved me, and you loved me before the foundation of the world and when the fall took place, that made no difference in his love, it was just the same. But he was pleased, in the infinity of his wisdom and the stability of his love, to take advantage of that circumstance, and to take occasion thereby more strongly and more astoundingly to open up the freeness, greatness, and certainty of his love. This is a subject we cannot enter into in a way of explanation, because of the greatness of it; we can generally dwell more comfortably upon some

subordinate departments and details. Hence, John keeps repeating the word “love,” and he looks at it as though he would say, “I should like, if I could, to give you a kind of analytical account of the elements of this love, that you might know more and more of it,” and found he could not do so; therefore, he wrapped it up in one short sentence, “God is love.” Not that God is love from necessity of nature; but that God, in consequence of the love wherewith he has loved his people, has come into such a position. All his dealings with them from first to last, when they are explained, whether we speak of his immediate influences upon the people or of what he suffers to take place, in all his dealings, at the last, when the ultimate explanation comes out, it will be found that he did everything in loving-kindness. If he permits affliction and trouble of any sort, it is done in loving-kindness; and what we know not now we shall know hereafter. But we cannot see into the love of God anywhere as in Christ Jesus the Lord. The apostle in Romans 5 really seems almost to labor, as it were, to set before us this great love, and the subject seemed to master him. Therefore, he takes a variety of views of the dear Savior, and makes that variety of views a means by which to set before us the love of God. “God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” When we look at this love, then, as shown in what the Lord Jesus Christ is, and when this love in the freeness and certainty of it is understood; when we view the Lord in the greatness and immutability of his love, binding himself to us forever, and binding us to him, we can then somewhat understand this text; because we can then see our God as he is represented in the eternal covenant, that covenant sealed by a Mediator’s blood. But if you go to the threatening’s of the Bible, to the old covenant, to the conditional promises, and the cutting reproofs of the Bible, and to many other things, there you will not see God’s love. I dare to say it has been the case with some of you, when you have read in the word of the Lord threatening upon threatening, misery on misery, and the very history of the Bible seeming little else but a history of blood. When we look at the deaths, and wars, and pestilences, and plagues; there we see sin, there we see Satan, there we see the law, there we see Divine wrath; there we see that that sets us at a distance, as it were, and engenders all sorts of hard thoughts of God. And we live in a day when men are grown bold enough to bring out these thoughts, and to record these hard thoughts of God, and to contend for them so far as to come to this conclusion, that they cannot believe God their Maker is the author of this book, containing such direful threatening’s; ergo, those parts of the Bible are not true. Not so the child of God; he does not deal with the truth in that way. He acknowledges the justice, terribleness, and certainty of the threatening’s; but then the man taught of God sees the end of them all; he sees that Jesus Christ is the end of the law, of the threatening’s, the pestilences, the famine, the plagues that he is the end of death; it is by him those words become fulfilled, “I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm.” Those insects could destroy that upon which national Israel lived, could destroy their harvests, their pastures and fruits; but in Christ Jesus we have pastures that cannot be touched; in Christ Jesus we have a harvest, garners full, affording all manner of store, where there is no breaking in, no going out, and no complaining in the streets; in Christ Jesus, we have a tree of life wherein there is no winter. We thus acknowledge the threatening’s, and know what it is to tremble at them; but we see Jesus Christ to be the end of them; and seeing him to be the complete and final end of these threatening’s, the consequence is the love of God is seen breaking forth in such a way, suited to us, as to forgive, forget, blot out, put away, every sin, and never name them; and to do this with

infinite delight, in all the strength of his eternal love; and his is the good will of God; it is from his love to us therefore Christ delighted to die, and carry out and establish this goodwill of God. When this covenant position of the blessed God is understood, what follows in that man's feelings? Why, that every testimony declarative of God's love of his Son, as to what Jesus Christ, is for and, to poor sinners, every testimony concerning the work of grace in calling us, in abiding by us; in a word, every testimony of the everlasting covenant becomes supremely dear to that man's heart. Why, he says, that, that touches the great doctrine of immutable love touches the apple of my eye. That will give you a little, but only a little, understanding of what the feelings of the blessed God, if I may so speak, are toward us if anything touches us. And if anything, touch the great trail of eternal election, if you take, election away, you take everything away. Even Wesleyanism itself could not, exist without election; for if there had been no election, there would have been no Jesus Christ to preach at all; so that they would not have had even their gospel but, for that very doctrine they deny; for we are "blessed with all spiritual, blessings in Christ Jesus, according as we were chosen in him before the foundation, of the world." And when we come to the mediation of the dear Savior, anything that touches or goes against his righteousness, his atonement, his resurrection, his intercession, his sure reign, and the safety of his sheep, for his sheep shall never perish, anything that goes against any of these truths touches us to the very quick, touches us in the apple of our eye. Are these testimonies, then, dearer to you than silver and gold? are they dearer to you, as far as you can honestly judge than, life itself? "Your loving-kindness is better, than life." Is it any wonder that those who were of old acquainted with these testimonies loved not their lives unto the death? They entered into the great secret of the love of God. This is one reason why he that touches the Lord's people touches the apple of his eye, because of his love to them. And the reason that anything that touches God's truth touches the apple of our eye is because those truths are dear to us. We can, in the broad, universal sense of the word say,

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on you."

These are they that love much, because they know if they are forgiven much is forgiven; these are they that love much, because they know that if they are loved they are loved freely; these are they that love much, because they know if they are loved it must have been intense love to undertake a case so bad as theirs to put away all the badness and constitute them something infinitely superior to what they were by creation. These are they to whom the truths of the gospel are as the apple of their eye. When people suggest, concerning your humble servant, that he is coming round, getting a little wavering, a little more charitable, well, I ever wish "to speak the truth in love to all men;" God forbid I should be left to a rancorous, unkind, unchristian spirit; but as far as these blessed testimonies are concerned, God in a covenant ordered in all things and sure, every day of my life these blessed things grow dearer and dearer to my heart. Here is my heavenly Father with not a single fault against me. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Here is the dear Redeemer, not a single fault against me; "you are all fair, my love; there is no spot in you." Here is the Holy Spirit comes in with his glorious testimony concerning Christ, that he has perfected forever them that are sanctified; and then he comes in again and says, "You are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power." Why to leave such a God as this, I should indeed be satanically insane; I must indeed have lost my senses, after what he has done for me. And the further I travel, the better I like the road; and the more I am with him, the better I like him. The Lord has never manifested himself to me, yet that it has not been an endearing manifestation; and

it always is. Has he not been to all of us a thousand times twice-told better, than our fears? And what is all this expressive of but his love? And he likes to be loved again, depend upon it. I daresay Simon, I do not wish to have too hard thoughts of him, I daresay he got up a very good table; and that the entertainment was very good; but the Savior very much more highly prized, and was infinitely more delighted with the woman's affection to him than he was with all the temporalities Simon could produce. It was the woman that drew his attention. Ah, if he were a prophet he would know? Well, he does know, and he will let you know that he knows, and he will explain the secret. Simon hoped to make the Savior ashamed of the woman, and to make the woman ashamed of the Savior. If I can make him ashamed of her, then perhaps she will think he is not the Christ of God; if I can part them, I will. But instead of parting them, they were more attached than ever. He looks at Simon, long faced Simon, Well, her sins are many; you know that; everybody knows that; but then they are forgiven. Then he turns to the woman; "Go your way, your faith has saved you." Better than ever. Not, your works have saved you, but your faith. How had her faith saved her? By receiving salvation; that's the way faith saves you, by receiving salvation. Your debts are paid you, and receiving the testimony that they are paid. He was the surety; the whole is swept away. That is the way in which her faith had saved her, by receiving the Savior. Thus, then through the love the Lord has to the people they are infinitely dear to him, and he endears himself to the people. And he Christ has died, put them all away, laid them to everlasting silence. Who would not love such a God as this? Hereby, and in a thousand other ways, the Lord endears himself to us; so that which touches anything pertaining to his honor or his eternal truth touches the apple of our eye if we are real Christians. If I hear a man preach, his gospel has a tendency to set the Lord at distance, to set up something legal, legalizing the gospel, that makes a kind of breach between the Lamb and his Bride; the Bride hears some very queer things about her Husband, and that he do not love so freely as she once thought he did, does not love so unconditionally as she once thought he did; and has not constituted his spotless, and will not abide by her according to that spotlessness into which he has brought her. No, say they, the comforts of salvation are conditional; and the Holy Spirit does not give to everyone severally as he will, but as the creature does his part, and deserves it. That has a tendency to make a breach between the Lamb and his Bride; and can such be called friends of the Bridegroom, they would sever the Bride from the Lamb, and give her mean, poor, low thoughts of him; and cause her to think little of that love of which it is written, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." I believe there are good men in this land, who, they were to preach a little more gospel, a little more grace, if (and heaven knows they need it badly enough themselves, but they are rather stingy of it to others;) a little more mercy, I do think they would get on better; for really it is such a dull, half-way tale they sometimes hear that we are like the child, glad when the amen comes. We can never out preach God's grace, God's Christ, God love. Ah! but, say some, it is presumption. What have I to do with what men say about that? The man that says it is presumptuous is no judge, or he would not say so. The man that says it is going too far is no judge; he is of the same spirit as Pharaoh; "you shall not go very far away;" the farther you go the better. Jeramiah says, "The Lord appeared to me of old;" the margin reads it as "from afar;" and brought me from afar into the far distant mysteries of that vast eternity to which we are heading, and to which with infinite pleasure our souls shall come. "He that touches you touches the apple of his eye." As to holding a creed and opinion, opinion, opinion, why, if you are a living man, every testimony of the gospel will be dear to you; it will be a living power in you, the living principle, living reality; you will be governed by it; you will love God by it, and pray to him by it, and expect all his interpositions on your behalf in providence and in grace by his

testimonies. Thus, there is a mutual, inextinguishable, eternal love established between the Lord, and his people. How much the Holy Scripture speak of this, and well they might.

The second thing from which this sympathy arises is the vitality of relationship. You know the difference between a mere legal and a vital relationship. We do see sometimes women show very great love to children that are not their own, and we always applaud it when we see it, because it argues a great deal of good in the character in the person; still they cannot feel as they would if the children were their own. However much you may love and respect others, you cannot feel as you do towards your own children; you cannot find out excuses so readily, or mitigations for others as you do for you own children; you cannot forgive others so readily as you do you own children. Hence in our prayers to the throne of grace for our children there is a vitality of feeling; we feel they are the children God has given to us, and we secretly pray that the time may come when grace shall come into and reign in their hearts. And the Lord will hear it if he give the spirit of prayer; if he do not hear those prayers while the parents live, he will when their heads are laid low in the dust; and perhaps when the children lose their parents, that shall be the very means of bringing them to the throne of grace, and to look to God. How they are left as orphans on earth, grace enables them to look to a higher relationship, and desire to be found among that happy people whose God is the Lord. Now in this matter of salvation there is a vital relationship, which of course is produced by this intensity of love. It is that which gives vitality to all the relationships in life. Whatever relationship exists, if this be not at the root, there is a want of vitality. What shall I say oi the vitality of the relationship existing between God and his people? You know in what way that vitality is manifested, in what way it is practically formed. The subject is beautiful beyond all description. The Savior took upon him the seed of Abraham, took our nature, and hereby became soul of our soul, body of our body, sin excepted. Ah, his sympathies were the keener for that; there was nothing in his nature to hinder the intensity of his sympathies. While Jesus Christ has two personal natures, God and man, he is but one Person. And hear this, you that are afraid almost to hope in his mercy, Christ and the church are no more two, they are one flesh; and he loves the church, and nourishes it, and cherishes it. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh." Christ never yet hated his own Bride, and he never will. Even when we are raised from the dead, and our bodies made like unto his glorious body, we shall never then enter into sympathies towards him so deep as his sympathies have been towards us. "The children being partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise took of the same, that through death," ah, must he die? Is his love strong enough for that? are his sympathies so inextinguishable as that? and do his sympathies penetrate through our sins, and lay hold of our souls and of our persons, and sympathize with us, not only as under the curse, not only under wrath, but sympathizing with that part of the people especially whose lot it is to walk all their days with doubts and fears, with a humble and trembling hope, but can never Abba, Father, cry. When they think of death, it is a terror to them; when they think of eternity, they rather shrink back from it than not. But notice the language, "That he might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Therefore, while it is the lot of some of the people of God to be in this bondage all their days, yet deliverance comes at the last; and it comes by his death, mark that, "through death" that he might through death deliver them. So then, poor doubting one, if you get free at last, it will be by faith in the death of Christ; if you see God's face with joy, instead of that terror which you fear you would experience at his presence, it must be by the death of Christ. How beautiful it is, "that through death he might deliver them." Bless his holy and precious name! It was his death that delivered us legally; it is his death that delivers us manifestly; it is his death that keeps up our hope now; it is his death that shall deliver the life-

long prisoner at the last moment, and it is his death that will give the triumph at the last, when all the redeemed shall burst forth in their new and eternal anthem, as many waters and as mighty thundering, saying, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, that gives us the victory by Jesus Christ." Here is a vitality of relation. And Jesus Christ's brethren are his brethren. Here is a vitality of relationship; it is not a mere acquired relation. And besides, not only has he taken their nature, but they are partakers of the divine nature. I do not mean that the perfections of God are communicated to them, but the apostle says they are partakers of the divine nature. They are born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever. And if you are partakers of the Holy Spirit, you are partakers of a divine nature; you are brought into the spirit of the Spirit of God; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and you are brought into the truth. And as the Holy Spirit is one with the mind and will of the Father, and one with Christ; so, being partakers of the Spirit of truth, you are partakers of Christ and of the mind, and will of God the Father; and thus, you are of one spirit with God. God has brought you into his spirit, so that your thoughts of salvation and his shall be one; your way of seeking to be saved and his way of saving shall be one. The Savior, therefore, took not on him the nature of angels; if so, they would have had a higher place than they now have, but he took upon him the seed of Abraham, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. That was done before you were born, it was done at Calvary's cross. Your faith has no hand in it, nor your repentance, nor your good works. All that we have to do, the Lord enabling us, is to receive it; we receive it by faith and repentance, by humility, hope, love, prayer, and praise. All these are the graces of the Spirit, by which we receive the reconciliation which the Lord Jesus Christ has established.

The third thing from which this sympathy arises is the prospect. God the Father has a good prospect for his family. He will not lose one of his children, and he will not have one disobedient child in all his family. He will not have one cripple, not one lame, not one blind, not one deaf; not one of his children will have a single infirmity. He will see his children just like the pattern he has ordained them to, his dear Son. "He has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son;" and Jesus Christ, even in his humiliation, had no infirmities of his own, or else he would not have been able to take those of others; he would have had enough to do with his own. But he had none of his own, so he took our griefs, infirmities, and sicknesses, and has put them all away. So that God the Father looks forward to eternity; it is not a matter of a day, nor of a thousand years; it is not a plaything of a millennium that men tell us of, that we are to have a thousand years on earth of something or other, I don't know what; the thousand years would soon go, and our lamps be extinguished, and how then? So that purgatory and the millennium may both be handed over to them, that like them, God has nothing for us after this but eternity; "absent from the body, present with the Lord." So, then, God the Father looks to the time when he shall see his family all that he wishes them to be. Then, also, the Savior looks forward and sees that he shall present the church to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish. So, the Holy Spirit looks forward to the time when he shall quicken our dust; for "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you." The sympathy, then, arises from this prospect. Let us apply this to our own soul's experience. Seeing that all temporal things, and things that are seen, "are to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Why, decided for God's truth, decided for that great mystery of godliness that is in and by Christ Jesus. Seeing all these things shall be dissolved, "be diligent that you may be found

of him in peace, without spot;” how can I be without spot? only by faith in the great truth that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; “and blameless;” I can be blameless only by the righteousness of Jesus Christ being imputed to me; and it is said that it shall be imputed to all them that believe. There is only one more way that I know of being without blame, and that is, not apostatizing from God’s truth. With all my profession and all my preaching, and all the little noise I have been enabled to make in the church and the world, if I could apostatize from the truth it would indeed prove that I was nothing but a mere Balaam all the time, gifts without grace, having the things in my head, but never receiving them into my heart; and that I had preached all this time in professed love to the people of God, when in secret, in my heart and soul, I hated them. Thanks, infinite thanks to God for a conscience in this matter clear as the sun at noonday. If you give up the truth you give up everything. The Old Testament saints all died in faith. You know the apostle’s triumph at the last; it is very beautiful; “I have kept the faith.” Positively all the world is a mere toy in comparison of that one blessing, “I have kept the faith.” If you keep that, you keep everything. There is nothing only by faith, it is all by faith. Why so? Because we possess nothing by nature, and therefore whatever we possess in a way of mercy, must be by faith in Christ. “It is by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.” If this be true, can we feel too much interested in that God who is to be our God forever? The interest you meet here from time to time to listen to, is not a temporary interest; it is not an interest that is of importance to you today, and may pass away tomorrow; it is an interest that increases in value as you grow in years, it grows in relative value? and when you come to a dying hour, it is of infinite value to you then; and at the last day, when you look forward to eternity. As I said yesterday afternoon at the funeral, when God puts eternity in the one scale, and time with all the things thereof in the other, and weighs them in your conscience, how eternity outweighs time; how light is life, the world, and all the things therein, in comparison of the weighty matters of eternity. Afflictions are the heaviest things of life, they bow us down very low; yet in comparison of eternal agonies these afflictions are light, and are subserviently working out for us an exceeding weight of glory.

The second doctrine contained in our text is that of *preservation*; which I cannot enter upon at any length; how the Lord will take care of his people. though he leads them about the wilderness, he keeps them as the apple of his eye; and David says, “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of your wings.” I will just name on instance or two where the Lord has brought his children off entirely uninjured; and I think these deliverances put upon record are to give us an idea of what the ultimate deliverance of the people of God will be. We have so many afflictions, wounds, and trials by the way that we sometimes think, where is the Lord’s word? He says, “Nothing shall by any means hurt you.” Why, says the child of God, everything seems hurting me; and yet there stands the truth that ultimately the people of God shall not be hurt. There are the three worthies in the furnace; what a wonderful thing! over these men’s bodies the fire had no power, and not a hair of their heads was singed. Can anything be more beautiful as illustrative of the ultimate triumph of the people of God? Here was the furnace seven times hotter than usual, yet not a hair of their heads was singed, “neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed upon them.” What a wonderful deliverance was this! Ah, what was it for? To strengthen our confidence in our blessed God, that whatever we have to encounter, he will overrule it to our infinite advantage, and his eternal glory. I need not, perhaps, quote Daniel; the Lord sent his angels, and shut the lion’s mouths, so that no harm came to Daniel because he believed in his God.

So, it is that he keeps his own night and day lest any hurt them, and by faith in God by Jesus Christ. They tread under their feet all those Satanic powers that would sever them from the truth, and in abiding by the truth they abide in all good things, they hereby continue in the love of God, and in the faith of God, and in the ways of God.

Job, upon a review of his having been kept in the faith, felt a sweet confidence that he should go forth as gold. And how beautifully does he set forth his work of faith in these matters! "My foot," says Job (that is, his faith), "has held his steps" the successive steps of eternal salvation. Perfection in Christ, sincerity in the truth, the new covenant, fear of God, and the banishing of all evil by faith in his living Redeemer, who redeemed him from all evil, his way (said Job) have I kept and not declined. Christ is God's way, and from that way Job had not departed. Neither have I gone back from the commandment. The commandment rendered effectual to all the saved is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Job never turned infidel, as many of the Israelites in the wilderness did, and as many professors do; neither did Job belong to a backsliding religion. He had not, he said, gone back from the commandment of his lips.