

A Discerning People

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning August 4th 1867, by

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"And judgment was given unto them."— Revelation xx. 4.

ONE theory among men, and very popular too, taken from the thousand years of this chapter, is that after the world has been standing six thousand years, then will commence this happy millennium, this thousand years; then this earth is to be turned into a heaven, and all the wonderful things they state are to come to pass. And what do you suppose that this theory is founded upon? I will tell you. In the first place, that as the world was created in six days, and the seventh day was a day of rest; so it must be that after the world has had its six thousand years of working days, then must come the thousand sabbatical years. Well, this is guesswork; there is nothing in that circumstance to authorize it. And another reason they assign for this theory is that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Very well. The next foundation upon which they rest is the great, the palpable, and fatal mistake that Bishop Usher has made in the chronology of the world. Bishop Usher gives from the creation down to Christ, 4,004 years. But Dr. Hales, Jackson, Kitto, some of the greatest Biblical scholars we have had (and I may say I have gone very carefully through all the three volumes of Dr. Hales, in his "New Analysis of the Chronology of the Bible"), have demonstrated from the Bible itself that the world had been standing between five and six thousand years when the Savior came, and that it has now been standing between seven and eight thousand years. So that their thousand years Sabbath is actually gone; for Bishop Usher's chronology is now proved to be as wrong as Galileo proved the ancient philosophers were when he discovered, not only the globular form of the earth, but its rotation round the sun, instead of the sun round it. This theory, therefore, of the seventh thousand years being a scene of sabbatical splendor, as they would have it, on earth is hereby broken to shivers, dashed to atoms, ground to powder, and is become as impalpable dust before a tornado. I really wonder that men should venture into such card houses, and should hold these theories upon such mere assumptions.

Now having made these two or three remarks, I will take a twofold view of our subject this morning. I will first notice, generally, the state of things under which judgment is given unto the saints of the Most High; and then, secondly, I will be so clear upon the senses or respects in which Judgment is given to them, that none shall misunderstand me except those who are determined to do so.

First, then, the state of things under which judgment is given to the saints of the Most High. In the preceding part of this verse John says, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them;" which thrones must not be taken literally, but must be taken in keeping with the character of their occupants. The occupants of the thrones are spiritual men; and I think that the 2nd of Ephesians is quite a sufficient explanation of this—"He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." It is expressive of the royalty of those positions occupied by the saints. And to dwell in God's love, to reign by that love, what can be better? To dwell in God's choice, and to reign by that choice, to dwell in God's decrees, or

promises if you please, and to reign by those promises; to dwell in the perfection of Christ, and by faith in that perfection to reign over sin, and death, and hell; nay, to say with the apostle that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us;" what can be better? These are the eternal thrones that they shall occupy as long as the throne of God itself unshaken stands; and "this honor have all his saints." "Judgment," then, "was given unto them" who are thus raised up. And then John says, "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded;" that is to say, I saw the Christians in after generations possess the same soul, the same spirit, the same elements, and with the same kind of character, as the martyrs; as it is said in the 4th of Acts, that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." And so from age to age in their oneness with Christ there is a oneness of soul. If Abraham could come down from heaven into this pulpit in our midst today, he would preach just the same truths that we are made acquainted with, believe, possess, and enjoy. Think you that there was any disagreement between Elijah, Moses, Peter, James, and John, on the Mount of Transfiguration? One had been in heaven 1,500 years, the other 900 years, and they appeared in glory; and was there anything in their testimony with which James, Peter, and John would disagree? Did they not speak of the wondrous achievement of the Savior? They spoke of the decease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem. That might be somewhat a mystery to the three disciples, because they were not yet perfect in knowledge; but Peter remembers this afterwards, and refers to the voice in the excellent mount. So, then, if James, Peter, and John had been a little more enlightened at the time than they were as to the great mission of the Savior, what a sweet oneness there would have been between them and the testimony of Moses and Elias! Where is there a Christian that has lived from that day to this, or will down to the end of time, that will not feel a sympathetic oneness with the testimony there borne by Moses and Elias? "The decease that he should accomplish at Jerusalem,"-why, everything centers in that; there is not anything without it; everything is there; there all is settled for time and eternity; and happy the man that can say, "My soul approves it well." Therefore "the souls of them that were beheaded" means that Christians have a common character, a common spirit. The Savior does not say what a Christian must be in one age, and then say something different from that will do for another ago-no; the religion of the Son of God does not follow the fashions of the world, does not conform itself to the fashions of the world; it is always the same. And though Christians may differ in degree of knowledge, zeal, love, experience, and so on, yet in kind they are the same in all ages. Therefore it is as true in one age as it is in another "Except a man forsake all that he hath, yea, his own life also," - he must look upon that as of little esteem compared to the cause of God, - "he cannot be my disciple." Then those to whom judgment was given "had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they" - generation after generation - "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years," - this mystic thousand years, the length of which none knows. There are some expressions in the Old Testament in keeping with this of the thousand years; as, for instance, in the 7th of Deuteronomy, at the 9th verse:-"The Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations." Would you take that thousand generations literally? No, but you would take it in the same sense that you must here take the thousand years,-mystically. And I will just run over a little ground that I have gone over before, it seems needful I should, after just observing that you all know what is meant by the beast. By the beast you are to understand the whole body of sin; it does not matter in what shape-profligacy or religious error, - the whole body of sin and error that is the beast. Hence in the book of Daniel it is said, "The body of the beast was given to the burning flame." Now we were all under the ruling power of the wild beast of sin and error; but this wild beast, as far as the saints were concerned, was given to the burning flame at Calvary's cross. There it was the Savior slew this dragon; there it was that God took almighty vengeance on all the sins of his people; there they were crushed, and there they were ended, there was salvation wrought, and there it was completed. And then, when brought to know Jesus Christ, you cannot worship anything that is contrary to God's truth, and contrary to God's Christ, contrary to his order of things, or contrary to that spirit of liberty that you have

in Christ Jesus the Lord. Now it is said, "This is the first resurrection,"-that is, regeneration. Religion that does not originate in the resurrection of the soul from the dead by the eternal Spirit of God, by the abundant mercy of the Father, by the quickening power of the Son,-for it is the joint work of the Eternal Three-the religion of any man or woman that is not founded in a spiritual resurrection of the soul from the dead by the power of God,-why, such a religion will certainly leave you where it found you-under sin, under the law, under death, and under the curse of heaven. "Blessed and holy," in Christ Jesus, "is he that hath part in the first resurrection," that is, regeneration; "on such the second death hath no power," because such are kings and priests to God, and shall go on reigning, generation after generation, during this mystic thousand years. But "the rest of the dead lived not again," all the rest that died in Adam; all died in Adam but the others, that are not found in the book of life, they continue in that death in which they died in Adam, they lost the life they had in Adam, and "lived not again until the thousand years were finished,"-until the last great day, when they are called out of their graves to receive that fearful doom recorded in the Bible. Oh, my hearer, we must take God's word as our guide, and not our feelings. The everlasting perdition of an immortal soul is an awful thing, and at the same time an unfathomable mystery. If am asked how it is that a God of goodness, and mercy, and kindness, could suffer such an amount of evil to exist as to hurl the highest angels into the lowest hell, and to ruin finally a number of the human race that perhaps no man can number, and to throw them into a lake that burns with fire and brimstone, without mitigation, alteration, or termination, - I confess, freely confess, that the judgment is to me altogether unfathomable. But God's word says it is so, and I dare not say a word against it, because I am a poor creature; I occupy a mere point, and he fills infinity; I am but of yesterday, and he is from everlasting; am but a creature, prone to err, like all others, but our God is boundless in his wisdom. The Lord help us, therefore, more and more to regard his word, to respect his word. Be assured, friends, that it is a truth when I say that no worship can be acceptable to the Lord wherein his word is not regarded. Whatever respect a person may profess to have to you, if he pay no respect to your words when he has no reason to believe that they are either insincere or untrue, and yet pays no respect to them,-what would you think of such a person? Ah, we find the Old Testament saints paid particular respect to the Lord's word. "Thus saith the Lord," "Thus saith the Lord," "Thus saith the Lord," was the watchword of all the prophets. Therefore we must admit the truth of what God says. And when we contemplate the fearful judgment, and come home to our own bosoms, our own hearts, our own lives, our own condition, and see that, terrible as is the judgment, we ourselves have as richly deserved it as those that are lost, we must ask the solemn question, Are we better than they? No, in no wise. If, then, we are made to differ, who is it that hath made us to differ? and what have we that we have not received? This, then, is the view I take of this part,- namely, that the thousand years means a time called a thousand generations in the 9th verse of the 7th of Deuteronomy; and that the thrones must be understood spiritually, the saints being raised up into the dignity to which I have referred. And as John the Baptist is spoken of as Elias, because of the likeness between the zeal of each for God,-for the circumstances under which Elijah and John the Baptist were, were very different, but there was a burning zeal in each for God; each had a mighty work to do,-one to advocate the honors of God, and to be the means of bringing the hearts of men to God; the other in bringing sinners to Christ,-as John the Baptist is called Elias, so here it is said, "The souls of them that were beheaded,"-that is, men of the like stamp of character, with the same grace and the same zeal. And the first part of this 20th of Revelation contains precisely the same subject that you read of in the 4th of Micah. You know what is said there of the progress of the gospel, and that "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." I believe with all my soul that this has no reference whatever to the nations of this world. While I hope and pray that war may not only lessen, but subside altogether, I believe it will continue down to the end of time. I believe that the words I have just quoted must be understood in keeping with the subject of which they treat. The Old Testament dispensation was maintained by the sword; it was a carnal dispensation, and therefore defended and maintained by a carnal

weapon, -the sword. God himself commanded them to use the sword and he was with them in the using of that sword, so that one man could put to fight the armies of the aliens, and David with a carnal weapon (for it was a carnal weapon) could slay Goliath, because God was with him. But the prophet Micah saw that a dispensation was to be established in which the sword was not to be used at all. Did the Savior obtain the salvation of sinners by the sword? He obtained it by a submissive, obedient life of suffering; he obtained salvation by taking our sins upon him, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, pouring out his soul unto death. Here is no sword used. Doth he not; say to Peter, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" And when the Savior would send his apostles to preach did he arm them with any one carnal weapon? Did he not say, "Tarry ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" And on the day of Pentecost did they use any carnal weapon? Was it not with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, that is sharper than any carnal weapon, that the hearts of thousands were pierced on that day? Did the apostles ever ask for the sword? Did the apostle Paul appeal to Caesar for the purpose of obtaining Caesar's power, or of getting Caesar to use the sword? Not a word about it. He appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen. The apostle was a Roman citizen, and he appealed to Caesar, not for Caesar to use his civil power to cut men down and kill them for not sanctioning the apostle's cause, or for not holding with him,-nothing of the kind. "I send you forth as lambs among wolves." thus, then, the meaning of the prophet is that a dispensation should be established in which the sword should be beaten into the ploughshare, and the spear into the pruning-hook, and they should not learn war anymore; that is, the Old Testament saints did learn war, and it was even important that they should learn war. Hence you read that David congratulates King Saul upon teaching the people the use of the bow, and so on; and the man that could teach others the use of the sword, he was congratulated. But here, in this New Testament dispensation, it is spiritual, and what we want is the sword of the Spirit, to pierce the hard heart; what we want is the word of truth in its life-giving power, to bring men into reconciliation to God. Here it is, in this Christian dispensation, then, there is no war, there is no violence, there is no destruction, there is no pestilence, there is no famine, no canker-worm, no palmer-worm, no caterpillar, no locust, no mildew, no blasting, no destitution; all is pure, all is peaceful, all is quiet, all is pleasant. "Violence shall no more be heard in thee, wasting nor destruction within thy borders." This is the sense, then, in which the sword shall be beaten into the ploughshare, and the spear into the pruning-hook; that is, the people of God shall understand that their kingdom is not of this world, that their religion is not carnal, that their weapons "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling on of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and bringing into captivity every thought -that is, every purpose-"to the obedience of Christ." Shall I then live long enough to be brought to believe that the civil sword can convert the soul? Certainly not. Shall I live long enough to believe that the civil sword, or any punishment inflicted by man, can bring one soul to God? No. Therefore I shall never learn war any more. I am brought to where there is no war-that is to say, no war in the violent sense of the word. Bless the Lord, there is a warfare, but then it is a holy one, a righteous one, shall I say a peaceful one? a warfare that wrongs no man, that defrauds no man; it is a righteous war. Then mark what is added,-"But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid." Ah, say some that will be a happy time. Well, I believe it will never come as long as the world stands, I believe it will never come to all eternity, not in the carnal, literal sense of the word. It has no such meaning. But if I take Jesus Christ to be the vine, I do sit under his shadow with great delight. I take Jesus Christ to be the fig tree, then thousands and tens of thousands before our day have sat under this vine and under this fig tree, and none could make them afraid. Ah, even while men, as to their worldly circumstances and their poor bodies, were wandering in deserts, and in caves and dens of the earth, even those men were at the same time spiritually sitting under this heavenly vine, this heavenly fig tree; and all the terrors that men could set before their eyes could not make them afraid. They were delivered from the fear of man; they feared not man; they knew that man could kill only the body, and that would soon die even if it were left alone and after that there was no more they could do. And now mark; to show that that sitting a under the vine and fig tree, and none

making them afraid, does not refer to a time of universal conversion of all men, but that the words must be understood as I have stated them, the next verse speaks thus:-"For all people"-that is, at this selfsame period -"will walk everyone in the name of his god, and we who are thus brought to the mountain of God, to the house of the God of Jacob; we who have received the law of life from Zion, the word mercy from the new Jerusalem; we who are thus reconciled to God:" we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever; in contrast to the temporary walk of the others, for they can walk in the name of their gods only while they live death will put an end to their walk; but death will only enlarge our walk, perfect our walk, and bring us to where we shall walk without encumbrance, without hindrance, or without in any sense mistaking our way. Thus, then, I get the mystic thousand years; I get the Lord's people spiritually enthroned, for there they are subscribing to Christ; get them in their first resurrection of regeneration; there they are blessed, and there they are holy; and get them reigning generation after generation with Jesus Christ, as long as this dispensation lasts; and get this uniqueness of the people-"the souls of them that were beheaded,"- all of the same character, of the same stamp. Hence we read in the 7th chapter of Revelation of "a number which no man could number, of all nations; "they all agree, they have but one voice; there is no want of unity and harmony. And here I also get the fact that this dispensation brings us into a state of things where we have everything; we have everything to be proud of, but not one thing to be ashamed of. They shall not use the sword-injure no one; every man shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree; Christ is his vine, Christ is his fig tree; the land of peace; brought into a peaceful realm, walking with a peaceful God, a peaceful Savior, the peaceful Holy Spirit, the peaceful Dove, the peaceful gospel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ. He is a man of peace; and while there are senses, which I must not now stop to notice, in which he is a man of war, yet in all these he is a man of peace. "And we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever."

We will now come to the next part -the senses or respects in which Judgment is given to the saints of the Most High. "Judgment was given unto them." It means not only that judgment, as we have before stated -and there is the sermon in print-is given in their favor, but it means that they themselves are constituted judges; and this is a subject I enter upon with very great pleasure. What is their qualification to be judges? First, there was a time when you were not able to form a right judgment concerning the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; but now, the Lord having brought you to know his name, ah, you judge of that righteousness as being the righteousness of God-Jehovah our righteousness; you judge of that righteousness as being everlasting - "He shall bring in everlasting righteousness;" you judge of that righteousness as exempting you from eternal condemnation; and anything contrary to it, your lively, piercing discriminating judgment in a moment discerns and rejects. Hence if you should happen to be subjected to the calamity of hearing a blind parson set up creature formality to help out this righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, he that is spiritual judges all things, and this is one of the things he judges; he rejects it, hates it, despises it, casts it away, and says, Get you hence with your hateful, loathsome, detestable doctrine. If I am arrayed before God at all, it shall be in the wedding garment of imputed righteousness. As you have been singing this morning,-

"The best obedience of my hands
Dare not appear before thy throne;
But faith can answer thy demands
By pleading what my Lord has done,"

This is one step towards your qualification to be a judge; this will lead to all that is said about the saints judging. Second, there was a time when you could not judge aright of the atonement of Jesus Christ; but now, oh, what a treasure to you, now what a pearl of great price! You know that if you were to attempt to find language to describe your inmost thoughts of and your estimation of the atonement of Jesus Christ,

you would not be able to do so. Ah, you would say, Jesus in his atonement! I can sum it up only in the language of the poet, that-

"All are too mean to speak his worth,
Too mean to set his glory forth."

And when you read Peter's words,—"Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ," you are ready to add in your own mind something emphatic to them, and say, Ah, precious indeed! Precious indeed! What hath it not delivered me from? What hath it not fitted me for? What will it not bring me to? What glory will it fill my soul with here! and oh, how infinitely welcome it will make me to the glory still in store! Precious indeed! Ah, there was a time when you were not a judge; you could not judge rightly of the Savior's righteousness, or his atonement. Ah, when the Jews were crucifying him, the Savior said, "Father, forgive them;" -they are no judges, or they are very bad judges:—"they know not what they do." Thirdly, there was a time when you were no judge of soul-trouble. You did not know what it was for guilt to lie on the conscience, for the soul to be under a fearful apprehension of being lost, and in the morning saying, "Would to God it were evening!" and in the evening, "Would to God it were morning!" everything seeming against you; and the more you strove, the further you seemed off from being what you sought to be. Ah, what a struggle! what miry clay! What solitude! what trembling! what doubting! what fearing! How many of the Lord's people have walked more or less in these gloomy shades even for years! There was a time when you knew not what this divine chastening was; when you knew not what these secret bitters were; when you were a stranger to this secret place of thunder. You could not weep spiritually with those that wept; you could not go down spiritually into the depths of soul-trouble. But now you know something of the wormwood and of the gall; not only at the first, but in after experiences as well; and thus you are enabled to judge. Hence if you hear others now state the way in which they have been brought to know the Lord, you can compare notes not only with your own experience, but with the word of God, and form your judgment accordingly. Again, there was a time—and that brings me to a point that I am in danger almost of running mad upon,—there was a time when you knew not what gospel liberty was; you were no judge of it; you did not know what it meant. But now you have realized in your soul the sweetness of God's word to take away in some measure, perhaps with some of you altogether, the bitterness of soul you have had; he has turned the bitterness into sweetness, the darkness into light, the bondage into liberty, and now you are brought to realize your interest in God's eternal and immutable love. You look at Jesus, and you say, Ah, here I am free, and free for ever. You look at the Holy Spirit; he dwells in you. And you reject, you spurn, you despise the notion that some have concerning the Holy Spirit, as though he was some way or another inferior to the Father or the Son, and carried on his work conditionally. You spurn all that, and rejoice, or rather pray in the language of David, "Uphold me with thy free Spirit." The Holy Spirit is free. He is represented, to denote his freedom, as the four winds,—"Come from the four winds." That denotes the Holy Spirit in the universality of his freedom. So God our Father hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy. If that were not the case I am sure he would never have had mercy upon me. So that I rejoice that he hath mercy upon whom he will. If he is pleased to have mercy on the thief on the cross, who is to say nay? If he is pleased to show mercy to a bloody Manasseh, who is to say nay? God my Father does as he pleases. As for men talking of a soul, under any circumstances, being destroyed for which Christ died, and that the believer must die in a certain state, a certain condition, just as though the soul's salvation was dependent upon something done by the creature—I hate, abhor, and detest all such doctrines. I will not have my God limited anywhere. He shall do as he pleases; or else woe to me if he does not! I hate anything that would shackle me, or rob me in any measure of the liberty of the gospel. You might as well try to bind the wind or the tide as to bind me here. I would rather die a thousand deaths than give up any part of my liberty. My feet have been like hinds' feet these forty years, bounding over these mountains of freedom. "Stand fast in

the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free." You need it. Look at your circumstance, see how they cast you down. Look at your state of mind- sometimes more like a demon than like a saint. Look at your many crooks and faults; and some of you that are pretty smooth, you are as proud as the devil, and that is worse than any of the sins of the man that does step aside sometimes. "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease." Under these circumstances what would you do were it not for the liberty you have in Christ? Bless the Lord, there we are free. Shut up in ourselves and cannot come forth in to the house of the Lord, but the God of the house can come forth to us, for who can hinder him? There was a time when you knew not what this freedom was; now you are a judge of it, and anything contrary to it you hate, despise, and fly from. Ah, but then men call you presumptuous and say your sermons are dangerous. What have I to do with that? What care I what men call me, or women either? It does not weigh a straw with me. I have to do with what my God calls me; I have to do with what I am there, and if I am right there I am right everywhere. Ah the sweet freedom that we have in Christ Jesus the Lord! So, then, it is for you to judge of this liberty, and if you judge of it a right, then you will esteem it a pearl of great price; you will reckon all your happiness to lie there. You will see that just in proportion as you get proud, and give up any part of the liberty of the gospel, just in the same proportion you become a crawling hypocrite, a miserable self-sanctifier, self-justifier, self-savior, and contemptible to the saints of God. Well, so there was a time when you could not judge, you were no judge of the new covenant, but now the Lord has revealed it to you,-a covenant ordered in all things and sure; and this is all your salvation and all your desire, though he make it not to grow. Now, forming this right judgment of Jesus Christ, forming this right judgment of soul-trouble from a personal experience of soul-trouble; forming a right judgment of gospel liberty from a realization of that liberty, and enabled to esteem its value; forming a right judgment of the everlasting covenant-these are the qualifications that will enable you to judge the world at the last. When you come to the last day, the saints shall judge the world. Suppose a saint were to judge a man in hell, what would he do? I know what the saint would do, even now. The believer would say, That man must stop in hell. What, the man in hell? Yes, the believer would say, he must stop there, unless there were conversions in hell, which there are not. The man is an Arminian; he is quarrelling with God though he is in hell. "Send one from the dead unto my brethren," that will frighten them. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets," if the work be not done by my word, it will not be done at all, even though one were sent from the dead. That man died in Arminianism; he thought to frighten a soul out of death into life. This knowledge of the truth, then, will enable you to judge the world. You judge the world now. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear"-that is, cautiously and carefully-"prepared an ark,"-and in that act gave his judgment to the world that they were all enemies to God together, and that God's judgment was right,- "and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." You will see in all this, friends, that the world in all ages has put a negative upon God's truth and upon God's sovereign grace, we among the rest, until the Lord opened our eyes, brought us from darkness to light, brought us to know himself.

Now there is one thing I wish you to understand, and then I close- that the people of God are in the Bible- the prophets too, sometimes- spoken of as doing actually what they do only testimonially. If you do not understand this, then many scriptures will be ambiguous to you. The Lord set Jeremiah over the nations, "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Not any one of these things did Jeremiah do actually, but he did so testimonially, he did so prophetically.