

A GOOD INTENT

A SERMON –Preached on Sunday Morning September 29th 1867, by

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"The intent."—Ezekiel xi. 4.

WE noticed last Lord's Day morning, from the other two words in this verse, to what Ezekiel by the Lord was brought, us representing that; to which he brings all the saints. Now those two words this morning call our attention to God's purpose that the Lord had a certain intent or purpose, which he explains, in bringing Ezekiel hither. And it is well for us that he hath an intent, that he hath a purpose, in all his dealings with his children; for there are a great many circumstances that we cannot understand; but it is a great privilege to know not only that the Lord understands and can manage them, but that he has some, as far at least as his own children are concerned, gracious purpose in the same. It was no doubt for the time being, a great mystery to Job, and we see it was an overwhelming mystery to his friends, for they never could believe that a God of goodness would so deal with him if there were not something materially wrong somewhere. And yet the Lord, to set up a bulwark and a defense against that, testified in the very beginning of what Job was. So you will find in your experience, in your circumstances, sometimes in your family, sometimes one way and sometimes the other, things that seem so contrary to that spirituality, to that devotedness to God, to that enjoyment of God, and to that peaceful way in which you would continue to serve God, that you will stand and stagger, and say, why is this? One of old went so far as to declare that the Lord had deceived him. "O Lord," he says, "thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;" and that his hope and his strength were perished from the Lord. Now, I say, it is a mercy and a privilege for us to know that the Lord hath in all this a purpose; but then the question is whether he hath a good purpose,—that is to say a purpose of mercy, a purpose of lovingkindness; whether we are included in the Lord's own word which he spoke to his people of old under discouraging circumstances when he said, "I know the thoughts I think toward you; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Now before I enter upon the subject before us this morning I may just name a scripture to show how we may form some Judgment as to whether we are a part of the happy number on whose behalf all things connected with our history shall work together for good. The apostle describes the character. He says, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." I have before said, and I here Just repeat the thought, for it is worthy of attention, and I desire to say it with that feeling which becomes so discriminating and so infinitely important a matter,—that the apostle Paul there represents God in the order upon which the affections of his people shall center and settle; he represents God in that order that shall be the foundation of their confidence and to which they shall be conformed. "Who he did foreknow." Now if there be any strangers here this morning yet inquiring after the truth, do not call that Calvinism or hyper-

Calvinism; leave out all human names and inventions, and come to God's word. Listen not to me, but to your Maker; not to me, but to the Judge of all, while I speak his blessed word. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." You observe that here is a people that he has taken knowledge of before the world was; and that this same people that he has taken knowledge of before the world was, he has chosen before the world was, and blessed before the world was, and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his Son, that is, he ordained them to oneness with Christ, so that he should become their life, and they should live; that he should become their sanctification, his blood cleansing from all sin, and so they should be holy; that he should become their justification, and so they should be righteous; that he should become their surety, and so they should be safe; that he should become their salvation, and so they should be saved; that he should become their representative, and that whatever he is that they are in God's settled order of things reckoned to be. This, then, is being predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. And whom he did thus ordain to this conformity to Christ, by receiving Christ and putting on Christ, them he also effectually called and whom he calls he constitutes in the manifestation thereof righteous—justified by faith and their justification is inseparably connected with their eternal glorification. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." But then they must love him in these truths, for you cannot separate God from his own truth. He loved the people after a certain order, and he has carried out that love after a certain order; and the very work of the Holy Spirit is to bring the people into that order. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,"- "to them who are the called according to his purpose." Now can we say this morning (though I shall have presently to go into the experience that makes way for these blessed truths)—can we say that our experience has so humbled us down, and so stripped us, and so convinced us of our utter ruin, as to make way in our souls for these blessed and eternal truths, and that we do love these truths, and that we do delight in and love God, and stand out decided for him by these blessed truths? If our tribulations have a tendency to sever us from those truths, then our tribulations are working together not for our good but for our evil, and we prove to be but stony-ground hearers. Whereas, if, on the other hand, our tribulatory experiences or circumstances make these truths, or the Lord in this settled order of things, more and more acceptable, more and more glorious, and dearer and dearer to our hearts, then let this stand as a sure sign of things working together for our good. It is not for us to see how, it is not for us understand the why and the wherefore; but there is a needs be, and we must leave it all with the Lord, go on and serve him, and trust him, and look to him. I am persuaded that if it were our lot - I was going to say happy lot, for a happy lot it would be—to look less to the creature and less to circumstances, and more to the Lord, then we should not be so often cast down and cut up because of the other loss. For it is nothing but looking to the Lord, and feeling that he must be our strength and our life, that can bear us up with something like equanimity and reconciliation to his dealings with us when he is pleased to show us hard things, make us drink the wine of astonishment, drive us to our wits end; all of which is to bring us on the knee of prayer, make us earnest in our prayer that he would appear and deliver us from our distress, and thereby make known increasingly the deep counsels of his will and riches of his grace.

Now I purpose taking a threefold view of our subject this morning. Our text contains the great theme or divine purpose—"the intent". First, the purpose of God to stain the pride of the glory of all flesh. Second, the purpose of God in bringing his people to receive the truth. Third and lastly, the special purpose of bringing Ezekiel to where he was brought as meant in our text.

First, just a word upon the purpose of God to stain the pride of the glory of all flesh. We may gather some instruction upon this from the 4th chapter of Daniel. And though I am not prepared to say that Nebuchadnezzar was brought to know the grace of God, yet what is said in connection with that humiliating state into which he was brought, and the testimony that Nebuchadnezzar himself bore at the

last, seems to me to be very expressive, and may be as it were, put into the mouth of every one that God has humbled. It is truth that we all do need humbling by the power of God. I cannot fully explain what a difference there is between spiritual humility and natural humility. When a man makes himself very humble, very good that is, so far as it goes. You always find the wisest men the humblest. Therefore do not understand me as saying a single word against natural humility. But then we may put on a sort of humility, we may bow, and curtsy, and undergo a great many sort of actions and doings that may indicate humility; but all this is natural, all this is assumed and performed by the creature, and differs very materially and very essentially from that humiliation into which God brings the soul when he stains the pride of the glory of all flesh. Now in the 4th of Daniel there is the purpose of that humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar expressed. It there says, "To the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it," where he intends judgment, "the basest of men." Where the Lord intends judgment to a nation, he will give them a base king; where he intends good, he gives them a good king. He intended to humble the Jews, and so he gave them Saul in his anger, and took him away in his wrath. Again, he intended to work out their liberty, and so he gave them David in mercy, and David was an unspeakable blessing to them. Now the Lord has given his people a king, and that king is Jesus Christ. And if the purpose of giving such a king as that be as good as the king himself, then how good must the purpose be! and it certainly is, for the purpose for which God gave Christ is as good as the gift or itself. He gave Jesus Christ in love, and the ultimate purpose of that is to carry on his everlasting love. But again, Nebuchadnezzar was brought down so low at least as to acknowledge the sovereignty of God as the sovereign ruler of all things. I do not say there was anything spiritual in that; but we may, in the beginning of our description, apply that to the Christian. "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing." Happy man you will be if you are brought to nothing. It is one of the hardest things in the world to be nothing—to be nothing but a sinner; not a good thought, not a good word, not a good work, not a single grain or atom of goodness, at a thing of naught altogether. "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing." Happy the man that can lay his hand upon his heart and say, "O Lord, thou seest that this is the light in which I now see myself—that I am nothing; that there is not anything I can be or do that thy holy law can by any possibility approve; for "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole." Thus he brings them to nothing. "And he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him what doest thou?" It is a great thing thus to be brought down. Now God has purposed this; he has purposed to stain the pride of the glory of all flesh; and he has purposed to do so first in all mercy, and then he will do so in wrath; that is, those that he does not deal so with in their life time as to humble them down that they may receive his truth, he will deal with in wrath at that last great, that tremendous day. Now what is that kind of experience by which we are brought down as described in the scripture I have just quoted? The apostle describes it, and he says, "The word of God is quick" —that is, living; it hath life in it,— "and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Let us have a word here very carefully. "The word of the Lord is sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." Every man's natural spirit is a spirit of ignorance, a spirit of unbelief, a spirit of enmity against God. Wherever true conviction enters, the soul is divided from the spirit of ignorance, and the soul comes into the knowledge of its own condition: the soul is divided from the spirit of unbelief, and comes into the faith of the gospel; the soul of the man, his immortal soul, is divided from the native enmity of the spirit; for the natural spirit; that is in us lusteth to envy, desireth to envy; it is the very desire of it, the very essence of it. Now when God begins his work it severs the soul from this spirit. Henceforth there will be between the spirit of the flesh and the heaven-born soul a conflict; for you will still retain this spirit of the flesh; it will go with you even to the last moment. "The righteous hath hope in his death." then this spirit in us that lusts to envy shall die; but it shall not die before that. Now what say we to this? Can we look back and say there was a time when we knew not our

condition as we do now; when we did not believe that we were so far gone in our state by nature as experience now tells us we are; when we thought we did not hate God, but when we came to hear his truth; now we see that we blindly hated his truth? And ever remember, if you hate God's truth you hate him. Now let this be fastened upon you. I will bring a scripture or else perhaps you may think I am assuming something. You recollect what the Savior says, - I think that scripture is to the point. The Savior says. "Ye have not the love of God in you." You will find a little further on in that chapter he says, "My word hath no place in you;" that is, my word of truth. Then again, in the 15th of John, there is another very important scripture to this effect—"If ye abide in me, and my words" - that is, my doctrines - "abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" So to hate God's truth, to hate his sworn and yea and amen truth, is to hate him. Satan in our days works into the minds of men a love to God; and just in proportion as Satan sheds abroad in the minds of men a professed love to God, just in proportion is their hatred to God's truth. That is Satan's love, sir. Saul of Tarsus, why he loved God, with all his heart—by Satan's love, and by the love of the flesh. I love God! he says. I so love God that if I could get at that Jesus of Nazareth, wherever he is, I would destroy him; and I will destroy his people as fast as I can and as far as I can. And why did he do this? Why, out of love to God; but it was Satan's love—Satan transformed into an angel of light. There was no real love to God; it was a pretended love to God. Saul thought he loved God; but at the same time, when God opened his eyes, Saul learnt that there was no such thing under heaven as true love to God and at the same time to hate his truth. See, then, the solemn importance of this matter—that the word of the Lord enters, and divides asunder soul and spirit, the natural spirit, one of whose features is enmity. If the Lord has caused the word to enter into our souls, and we are made alive, then I say that state is brought to light, and the soul delivered from enmity, and now loves the truth; and if you love the truth, you will love God; if you hate the truth—I mean the sworn, yea and amen truth of the gospel—then you hate God. "To the law and to the testimony"—and the law there means the law of faith, and the law of faith is "he that believeth hath everlasting life:" the law of faith is the law of perfect freedom, —"so speak and so do as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty;" - he has done "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." This point on which I am now dwelling is a matter I increasingly feel the importance of; for I am sure that God the Father is a God of truth; I am sure that Jesus Christ is a minister of truth; I am sure that the Holy Spirit is a minister of truth, that he is the Spirit of truth; and the Lord hath promised that his people shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free, when his great purpose, this great intent is carried out—to stain the pride of the glory of all flesh, that we should have nothing left to glory in but God himself. And this word entering into the joints and marrow means that the creature is thereby disjointed, he is crippled, "and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart;" for "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Thus such an one trembles at God's word, and is humbled before him. Now I will leave you to judge what you know of this humbling work, this discovery of what you are.

Secondly, I notice the purpose of the Lord in bringing his people to receive the truth. If the Lord has thus brought you down far enough, then I will name now the truths that you will be glad to receive. I have anticipated in a great measure this part; but I will take to explain it that scripture in the 1st chapter of the second epistle to Timothy. The man that is from his own experience prepared to receive that testimony certainly is not far from the kingdom of God; the man that is prepared from his heart and soul to receive that testimony in the understanding of it, in the love of it, and to abide thereby—there never was one so poor in spirit, there never was one so humbled, there never was one so led, and at the same time lost. No, if we are saved, it will be by the truth of God. I could give plenty of instances of this, and I will here give two or three before I quote the scripture in Timothy, to show how easily you may be deluded by false doctrine. Now, for instance, supposing some man had been making his way to the ark, and suppose he had been a believer, but at the same time rather deficient in understanding; suppose some clever man

had met him, and had persuaded him that that ark was not the way of escape, or that that high mountain, or that high tower, or that tall tree, was the way of escape. The flood will never reach that. Don't you be a fool. That Noah is a dangerous old fellow he is a free grace man; he is one of those Antinomians; he is a very dangerous man. Don't you listen to him. You go to that high mountain, or to that high house, or to that high tree, and there you will see the whole, but it will not reach you. Well, we will suppose the simpleton believes this; away he goes to this mountain, to this tree, or to this high castle. By and by the flood comes, rises fifteen cubits above the Himalaya Mountains in India, which are the highest, I believe, in the world. Why, the poor wretch is deprived of life before the flood has reached one half of its height. Ah, if that man could come back again from death, what would be his testimony? You see here, how false doctrine misled and deluded him. And then again, the paschal lamb;—suppose someone had persuaded some Israelite to choose some other way of escaping the angel of death. But why do I thus enlarge? Have you not the word of God full of testimonies of men being deluded by false doctrines? Was not a good man once misled by a doctrinal lie, if I may so call it, and lost his life-by listening to the false prophet? And I should imagine that the true prophet was a pliable, plastic, pleasing, accommodating, good-natured sort of man naturally. Some are. None of us can help our natural temperaments. A great many have found fault with Luther because he was such a stern, determined fellow. He never would have accomplished what he did if he had not been. And so he was prepared for his work. And Melancthon, who was just the opposite, he was prepared for his. So the false prophet, a venerable old gentleman, saw the kind of man he had to deal with, and he persuaded the true prophet to come back with him. He very soon found out that he was mistaken, that the other had lied unto him; and then he pursued his path. But here was a public transaction. He had borne a testimony against the calves, and the altar on which sacrifices were offered to them; and when Jeroboam stretched out his hand against the prophet, it was paralyzed, and the prophet prayed for the restoration of it, and it was restored;—it was a public transaction. And then the prophet turns round and amalgamates as it were with the false prophet, and did not carry out the vindication of his message; so God stepped in, and slew his own servant, though the lion was not suffered to tear the body. Hear then, if we are not fatally deceived, we may be misled, and greatly misled, and pierce ourselves through with many sorrows. God give us decision for the truth. If we are really brought down, and know our nothingness, our hearts are prepared to receive the testimony in the 1st chapter of second Timothy. The apostle knew the tendency; he knew that Timothy would get no worldly honor; he knew it would make Timothy rather what they call narrow-minded; he knew it would so make the world, but he says, there is a question before creation that concerns me more than creation, so, before I make the world, I will settle as to my family. They shall be all registered, and all given to Christ; and all their faults set down to him, and all his excellences and eternal glory set down to be offensive to many professors, but he says, "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner," as I am a prisoner for that testimony. Now comes what the testimony is. "Who hath saved us?"—that is the first thing he did. God did that before he made the world. God was going to make the world, but he says, There is a question before creation that concerns me more than creation so, before I make the world, I will settle as to my family. They shall be all registered, and all given to Christ; and all their faults set down to him, and all his excellences and eternal glory set down to them. That writing has never been altered. "He hath saved us" That is the first thing. Believe thou this? Art thou brought down low enough to trace up thy salvation to this divine, this pure and heavenly source? "And called us with an holy calling, not according to our works"- no—"but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world begun, and is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." There is a clear epitome of the gospel itself. Doth this offend you, or doth it please you? Are you sorry such testimonies are on record? Or can you set your soul to it, that unless you are saved after that divine order you never can be saved at all? Then, if so, I may apply to you the words here, which the Lord spoke to Ezekiel, "Son of man, behold with thine eyes; see after what a divine, what a righteous, what a lovely, what a gracious,

what a merciful, what a glorious way God hath saved thee. "And hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee; for to the intent that I might show them unto thou art thou brought hither." So, poor sinner, you may set your heart upon these truths, and you will never have to take it away again. We all have a tendency to set our hearts upon earthly objects; I am not going to be so unnatural as to say there is any harm in that, in a proper way; but at the same time, all that must be dissolved, must pass away. We have, in the circumstance we shall contemplate this evening we have there taken away a good husband, and a good father, a good Christian, a good deacon, an honorable member of this church for so many years. Yet you see he must pass away. There is none abiding. But, bless the Lord, there is a sense in which those of our brethren that death takes from us, do not pass away, for they are still in the Lord, they are still with the Lord, and we shall as surely meet them again as that we are assembled here to-day. It is only a separation for a little while. We are left to toil in the wilderness a little longer, while those that are in heaven look down and smile on all that is past. They have now no desire to return and see how matters are going on, because they so well know there that everything is in the Lord's hands; and therefore, for them to desire to come back and see how matters are going on, would be as though they could not trust the Lord. They now see his full glory, and are themselves perfectly satisfied that the same omnipotent power, and the same grace, and the same faithfulness that brought them will bring every one of the rest; not one shall be left behind. "Behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee;"—"upon all that I shall show thee." Not what men shall show thee. A great many things are pretended to come from heaven, but I must not meddle with them this morning, because it would be rather a waste of time. But just look at it—"all that I shall show thee." Let us be sure that our hope, or that in which we hope, is of God; let us be sure that that on which we set our affection is of God; let us be sure that our religion is of God. The Savior perpetually reminds us that all he said was of God. He received not one iota from man. "The words I speak are not mine, but his that sent me." "The words," the doctrines, "that thou gavest me I have given unto them and they have received them, and know that I came out from thee, that all things are of thee." And they went east, west, north, and south, and scattered the same immortal seed, to the regenerating of thousands and tens of thousands of souls. And God has still a few sowers in the midst of this world that do not sow mixed seed, but that go forth bearing precious seed of precious truth. It is thus they go forth weeping, but then they shall come again rejoicing; they sow precious seed, and shall ere long come again rejoicing bringing their sheaves with them. So "behold with your eyes,"—see for yourself—"and hear with thine ears" —for yourself,— "and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee." These things do win our hearts. Why, I have no more doubt of my love to God's truth than I have of my existence. And just the same with you. Why, what could one put in the place of God's truth, the testimony of his love, and of his grace, and of his salvation, and of his promises? The Lord says, "What is the chaff?" Ah! Chaff indeed, Lord, compared with thy blessed truth.

But I suppose I must now come to the last point,—the special purpose of bringing Ezekiel to where he was brought, as meant in our text. Ezekiel was brought to the river of God. There was a river. That river represents the gospel. Just take a fourfold view for a moment of that. First, its source—it came from under the threshold, just the same as we read in the last chapter of the Revelation of a river proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. Son of man, behold with thine eyes and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon this river. That river I take to represent the gospel in the life and blessedness thereof. That is one thing, then—its source. The second is its increase—it went on increasing. And just so the gospel, in direct contrast, as we sometimes say to this life. For some of us are getting into the shades a bit; and this is narrowing and that is narrowing, and the time is drawing nigh when we shall say we have no pleasure in this life. But, then, there is pleasure there—the river of God's pleasure—and those who drink of that river, "they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and nourishing!" Bless the Lord for this. Look at the source of the river God himself; look at the increase—while other things decrease that increases. Ah, my hearer, presently every little river of consolation will run dry, and thou wilt be left

in the earthly sense hopeless. But "there is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God," when there is nothing else to make thee glad—"the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High." And then mark also the power of this river. There is a lake on the southeastern side of Judea, about forty-five miles long, and from, perhaps twelve to fifteen wide; that lake has nothing in it in a way of life. Nothing can live in it; it is so bituminous, so nauseous, and so deadly, that nothing can live in it. Now this river was to turn this lake into a fresh-water lake; for the river was to come down into this Dead Sea, and the waters were to be healed. You can see what that means, can you not? that the souls of men are in a state of death and bitterness. And this water of the Dead Sea, all travelers tell us, is nasty to the last degree to drink; you could hardly be put to a greater punishment than to be obliged to drink half a pint of it; you would not forget it for a twelve-month. And just so the mind—the soul. Ah, think not I am going too far; the simile is familiar indeed, but it conveys a most awful truth—that the thoughts, and desires, and purposes, and pursuits—the souls of men altogether, are in all their doings infinitely nauseous to the most high God; everything that is loathsome. Ah, could we see ourselves as he sees us, could we see sin as he sees it, we should indeed stand aghast; for "the heart is," even beyond angelic comprehension, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Yet these waters were to heal this Dead Sea, turn it into a fresh-water lake. Just so the gospel comes, destroys the bitterness, destroys all that is unpleasant, and turns the soul into that that is pleasant, to holiness, to righteousness, as pleasant to God as it was before unpleasant. Hence the Savior says to the church, "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights." As acceptable now as we were objectionable before; received now by Christ Jesus with infinite delight, he saying, "Now ye are clean"—not through anything you have done, for thou hast no healing medicine that can reach thy case; but "now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you." Is not this a glorious purpose, then, thus to bring us to see the source of these blessings, the increase of these blessings, while others decrease; the power of this river to take away everything unpleasant in the Dead Sea; and so the gospel takes away everything that is unpleasant. When the Savior has done there will not be one unpleasant thing left. The last unpleasant thing is death; by and by that will be gone, that will be swallowed up in victory; and then it will be, "at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits"—nothing unpleasant—"new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved." To the intent, then, that I might show thee this river thou art brought hither. So with you; to the intent that you might see the blessings of the gospel art thou brought thus to understand them. There is another view of the river that I may just name, and that is that on its banks were trees whose leaves faded not, and that brought forth new fruit "according to their months." Let these trees all of them represent Jesus Christ, and let their leaves that never fade represent his promises; and let the fruits that are perennial and immortal represent the blessings that come to us by those promises. "And the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine;" and so the people were to be well, and to be well supplied. "The inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." I had intended to notice the inheritance—what is meant by its going from east to west. Every tribe is to inherit from east to west, the whole breadth of the land.