

Things Which Concern Us All

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning, Feb. 11th, 1866, by

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"And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, it is done."-Rev. xvi. 17.

In the beginning of this book we are encouraged to pray to the Lord to enable us to understand it; for it saith, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand." In what sense, then, was the time at hand in which these things were to be fulfilled? Chronologically speaking, the time was not at hand. But in the relative sense the time was at hand; that is to say, those Christians who were then living would very soon be taken away to a better world; and so of every generation down to the end of time; and therefore always it is true, "The time is at hand;" always it is true! "The Judge standeth before he door" always _it is true, "The coming of the Lord draws nigh;" When, therefore, we take these holy scriptures in the best and most advantageous sense in which we can take them-namely, as relating to us,-then there is no difficulty in understanding them- at least to my mind. When the learned try to explain this book of the Revelation in a literal and a chronological sense, they appear to me to do away with the practical and instructive character of the things therein recorded, and we lose the spiritual advantages to be derived therefrom. Now it is with the latter part of our text that I have to deal this morning, having noticed in my discourse last lord's day the preceding clause, "And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air, and those that did not hear it must read that sermon in order to understand that portion of the text. We have, then, this morning three more things to attend to. First, the temple. Secondly, the throne. Thirdly, the testimony here given. "And there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, it is done."

First, then, I will notice the temple; and I take the temple here to mean the church of the living God, which, as you are aware, is again and again called in the word of God a temple; and it is in our text called, very-significantly and very beautifully, the temple of heaven,-that is, the heavenly temple; because it is a temple made up of heavenly materials. Hence at the close of the 2nd chapter of Ephesians you read, "Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." You observe it is in Christ-it is by him that we are thus built up. And in the preceding part of that chapter we have the character of the people who are thus built up into a heavenly temple beautifully described, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And

it is beautiful to observe the entire accordance or uniqueness of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although prophets and apostles varied in their gifts, yet how unanimous is their testimony: in things pertaining to eternity. Hence, wherever the Holy Spirit is the teacher-wherever he makes the soul wise unto eternal life, that soul, as the consequence, is sure to be united to Jesus Christ in what he hath done and in what he is; sure to be raised up with Christ where he is: and see how the Saviour confirms this; for he says, "Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." It may well be called, then, the temple of heaven, or a heavenly temple, made up of a people formed for eternal glory. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." This voice spoken of here is nothing else but the voice of Gods truth-the Judicial part of his truth, and the gracious part of his truth; these are the voices that will issue from the church of God, because the church of God or the people of God in all ages have borne testimony of the mercy which they have found, and of the judgments which they have escaped; this has been their voice, and it is their voice now. You find in the 6th chapter of this book, where you see the black horse, "The third equestrian seal was opened, and lo, a black horse, and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand." Dr. Keith and some other good Greek scholars prefer rendering the Greek word there translated balances by the word yoke; "he had a yoke in his hand," to put a yoke of bondage upon the people of God. I myself certainly prefer that translation, because I cannot doubt that that black horse is a figure of a system that would crush the liberty of the gospel so the object of the rider on the black horse-the design of Satan: was to withhold the provisions of the gospel from the people. Now it is said, "I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts;" that is, the four living creatures. Just remember here, that the Israelites encamped, four square, in the wilderness, and the tabernacle was in the center of this square and you will see that the voice came not, as in our text, from the temple, but from the midst of the four beasts, and they both mystically and spiritually typify the same thing. There came a voice from the midst that is from the tabernacle, from the mercy-seat, saying "A measure of wheat for a penny." What does this mean? Why, it means that Satan, with all his dark designs should not be able to rob the household of faith of the finest of the wheat, he should not be able to withhold from the household of faith that provision which the Lord hath promised. "A measure of wheat for a penny." A penny was at that time, as you read in the 20th of Matthew, the usual pay for a day's labor, which penny the learned in these matters think was equal to about seven pence halfpenny of our money; it may seem to us very low wages, but that would depend upon the amount of food which that sum of money would command: which, of course, must have been a much larger amount than it does now. "A measure of wheat for a penny" it means that the people of God shall have their daily bread; the Lord will provide for them. "And three measures of barley for a penny." Now you see here is more barley than wheat; we should naturally not altogether like that; we would rather have more wheaten bread than barley bread; but the Lord has so ordered it that we shall have more barley bread than wheaten bread. You know people never eat barley bread if they can get wheaten bread; but then we know that while barley bread is more common, it will sustain and support people; it was with barley bread that the Saviour fed the multitude. You will therefore understand spiritually what is meant by this barley bread; it means the sorrows, and the troubles, and the conflicts, and the exercises you have. Well, it is better to have godly sorrow than ungodly joy; it is better to have this barley bread, it is better to be thus tried, discouraged, and exercised; it is better to live in that way, with the poor of the Lord's people, than to share sumptuously every day with the rich man, and be in hell at last. So the Lord will take care that we shall have plenty of this kind of bread; and how often is it, as I have already hinted in the Psalm we read, that those parts of the word of the Lord that describe us in these our troubles sometimes pick us up, and it is like the miracle of the loaves and fishes-we really become fed with this department when perhaps we did not expect it. And there is another command given to this dark system, whatever system it may be; whether it be Popery or any other system, it does not matter what it is: but you will find that all false systems have a tendency to take from us the provision which our God hath made; there is nothing that so stirs up enmity as the completeness of the gospel; and therefore the unjust steward, he thought if he reduced the king's

household from a hundred measures of wheat to fifty, and from a hundred measures of oil to fourscore,- he thought if he preached that half- way gospel he should be received by those around him; he cared not for his Lord's household, but only for his own name and fame. Now mark the command, "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine." What is this oil but the grace of God? And has that ever been hurt yet? Never, and you cannot hurt it. Not all the sins of the people of God, of which they are the subjects, can hurt the grace of God, nor can all the doings of men hurt the grace of God. "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine." And what is the wine? Why, the precious blood of the everlasting covenant, and it is our very glory that can never lose its power. Neither Popery nor any other false system has ever been able to hurt that; for all the misrepresentations that have been made of Jesus Christ do not alter Jesus Christ, and all the misrepresentations that have been made of his atonement do not alter that atonement, and all the misrepresentations that have been given of the blood of the everlasting covenant do not alter the same. Thus, then, it is a voice in the temple, and a voice by the Temple; they all bear testimony that the Lord feeds them, they all bear testimony of the sufficiency of his grace, they all bear testimony of the blessed effects of the blood of the everlasting covenant. Such is the temple of God in other words, such are the people of God; so that we may well say with one of old, "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thine holy temple." The Lord bring us to live more and more in these blessed things, for it is a blessed life; it severs us from the world, it endears the Holy Three, it endears eternity, and it makes the better country more desirable than anything else; for all these are, shall I say, the produce of that better country,-which produce, in its perfection, shall be enjoyed when we enter there.

But, secondly, I notice the throne. The Lord hath chosen Zion, and he dwells there. There is, in the 4th chapter of this book, a very lovely presentation of the throne by which the Lord appears to his people; called in the Old Testament the mercy-seat, and called, as you are aware, In the Hebrews, the throne of grace, though that same throne will be a throne of judgment; Christ will be a consuming fire, as a judge to his adversaries; but it is a throne of grace, a mercy-seat, a throne of glory, for all those that seek him. As a poet has somewhere said,

"Behold the boundless grace of God;
Christ is the comer-stone,
Who is to all that seek his face,
The rainbow round the throne."

We read in the 4th chapter of this book. "He that sat on the throne was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone." It is nothing new to you for Jesus Christ to be called a precious stone, and you recollect that beautiful scripture in the Proverbs, which certainly the Saviour answers to, very beautifully-namely, that "A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it;" but not in the eyes of him that hath it not or hath him not. When we were in a state of nature was he the pearl of great price in our eyes then? Was he a precious stone to us then? Could we enter into that scripture then, where the apostle Peter saith "To you that believe "-we possess it by faith-"he is precious." And it is said "Whithersoever it turneth it prospereth." I need say nothing upon that because it is so clear He turned to the law, prospered and magnified that; he turned to our sins, and prospered in destroying the whole; he turned to the new covenant, and prospered in carrying out, and will carry out, its items for ever; "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. But the Lord, appearing on the throne as a Jasper and a sardine stone, is to denote not only his purity and his preciousness, but it is a form of speech that denotes the riches of our King; that our King is not a poor King. So, then, the Lord appearing thus on the throne as a jasper and a sardine stone, denotes, I say, his exceeding riches; that he is rich in the very thing, whether you feel it or not, which you need, and that is, in mercy, he is rich in mercy. I do not think, if you were to go through all the vocabularies of language in the world, you could find out an expression more suited to us than that.

What can be more charming, more endearing, more softening, more enlightening, more encouraging, more delightful than the thought that he is rich in mercy? He is not grudging in mercy, he is not sparing in mercy, he is not narrow or limited in mercy; he is rich in mercy. And if we ask, to whom he is rich in mercy? why to all that call upon him. Well, but, saith one, I cannot make a prayer. Then your experience will make a prayer; and if you can but only utter one prayer, it will meet the case—"God be merciful to me a sinner." Here, then, is a throne of rich mercy, rich to all that call upon him. And then this throne is said to have a rainbow round about it. Now you all know how the rainbow was first given as a token of the Lord's covenant, that the earth should no more be drowned; but then, of course that was only temporal in its originally being given. But when the rainbow appears round about this throne, it denotes that everlasting peace, gladness, and blessedness, which are by the Lord Jesus Christ. "And before the throne there was a sea of glass;" that is, the gospel in its purity, so I take it. "And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven spirits of God," or the Holy Spirit in the completeness of his ministrations. "And round about the throne were four-and- twenty seats, and upon the seats I saw four-and-twenty elders." If you go to the 24th chapter of the First Book of Chronicles, you will find there that David divided the priestly service into twenty-four orders; so that these twenty-four elders seem to refer to the twenty-four chief priests and then there was one high priest over them all, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. And these twenty-four elders before the throne represent the people of God; twelve of them I apprehend, perhaps, to represent the Old Testament saints; and twelve of them, perhaps, to represent the New Testament saints, and the twelve, perhaps to represent the New Testament saints, if the division be allowable, which perhaps it hardly is; perhaps we had better take the twenty-four to represent the whole church; that just as these elders are before the throne clothed in white raiment with golden crowns upon their heads, so they represent what all the people of God shall come to; and as they cast their crowns at the blessed Emmanuel's feet, how willingly shall we do that! You know that when provincial kings of old were raised to the throne, as an act of acknowledgment to the superior monarch, they would lay their crowns down at his feet, to denote that they received those crowns from him and that the praise and honor were due to him, and that they would have henceforth to live subservient to this superior king. So these four-and-twenty elders cast their crowns before the throne. And we may take these elders as representing what we shall come too ultimately. We know not what we shall come to exactly in this world, but not anything very bad; the grace of God hath got hold of us, and we have done hitherto, and we shall do; the Lord liveth and reigneth; and if we want to know what we shall come to ultimately, there is Jesus Christ as the pattern, and there are the twenty- four elders as representatives. People sometimes say, "Oh, I should like to be that man; I should like to be so-and-so; I should like to be so-and- so;" but the best like, after all, is to have a liking to be like Jesus Christ, to be with him, and there see him as he is. Here, then, is a God reigning in the riches of his mercy, and the apostle would have us come to the throne of grace; here is the rainbow around the throne; and if you ask what the rainbow is, my answer is, Jesus Christ. Well, but, say you, if he be on the throne, and the rainbow is round about the throne, how can you make Jesus Christ to be the rainbow? There appears something incongruous in that. Well, we must be careful to note in what sense he is the rainbow. If the rainbow be the symbol of peace, and the assurance of eternal plenty, then Jesus Christ is our peace, and the symbol and assurance, I may say, of eternal plenty. You know, in the 10th of John, the dear Saviour calls himself both the Shepherd and the door; and you will say, why, how can he be the Shepherd and the door both? Well, by the work that he has done. Personally he is the Shepherd; but by the work he has done he is the door. "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." He is the way by which we have access to God. Personally he reigns; but by the work he has done, he is the rainbow round about the throne. Bless his holy name! He is indeed all and in all; there is no part of the gospel where he is not seen, for without him it is not gospel. The very business of the gospel is to set forth the dear Saviour in the variety of characters which he bears. Thus, then, I take the voice in our text to mean the voice of God's truth, the testimony of his people; and I take the heavenly temple to mean the true church of God, the true tabernacle, which God pitched, and not

man, wherein Christ is the Priest, as shown in the 8th of the Hebrews, after the order of a faultless covenant. And then I take the throne to mean that throne of grace, that gospel throne, wherein the Lord appears rich in mercy, wherein he appears in peace; wherein he appears surrounded by the representatives of the church, and where the living creatures appear and where they are happy, and nothing to do night and day, nothing to do forever, but to enjoy the Lord's presence, and spontaneously, and with an intensity that we know comparatively little of, crown the Redeemer Lord of all; into that joyful, endless life, our souls, if made acquainted with these things, shall as surely come as that our representatives themselves are there.

Before I come to the next part I may, perhaps, just say a word or two upon some of the circumstances connected with our text. After this wrath is poured into Satan's atmosphere, certain events take place. First, "there were voices, and thunders, and lightning's." These voices, of course, are the voices of the prophets; and the thunders and the lightning's mean the testimonies of God's word, whether threatening's or promises; for the testimonies of God's word have been made like peals of thunder to the consciences of thousands. I will tell you a scripture that was like a peal of thunder to me when I was under concern about my state. I was already convinced of my state, and was seeking the Lord, but I did not yet understand the way in which he was so gloriously just and yet justifying him that believeth. These words a minister quoted in his sermon, and what their meaning was I did not know, but they were like a peal of thunder to me; namely, "Make your calling and election sure." What that election could mean I could not understand; and the calling, I could not understand that; it made me dreadfully miserable for works, but it did me a great deal of good; for it kept me awake, spurred me on, and made me more earnest in prayer to God. I may say that scripture to me was a voice from God's throne; that scripture to me was like a peal of thunder; that scripture to me was like a flash of lightning. So that, even in this experimental sense, there is not much difficulty to the people of God in understanding what is meant by the voices, and thunders, and lightning's, especially as some of the apostles were named sons of thunder. But we will go on, "And there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great." I apprehend that this has a fourfold, and more than that, but I will name only four-a fourfold meaning. An earthquake, in a figurative sense, means some great convulsion, some great revolution that takes place. I apprehend this was first fulfilled in the, Jewish nation. What a convulsion, what a revolution, was that which swallowed up the nationality of the Jews! and they have never been a nation since, and according to my way of thinking never will be again. Secondly, what a mighty convulsion was that when, in the beginning of the third century, Constantine the Great professedly turned Christian, overturned the Pagan world, in other words, the outward Paganism of the Pagan world; what a tremendous convulsion took place then! Thirdly, how many earth- quakes or convulsions have taken place, not only in Rome Pagan but also in Rome Papal, and will do again before the end of time! Though there will ultimately be the final earthquake to swallow up the great Babylon at large. "And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nation's fell." Here, again, you see we must do as we have done before; we must not take the three parts here literally, but the city being divided into three parts means that they were divided among themselves and against themselves. And so the Jews, everyone knows, were divided against themselves; the Pagans were divided against themselves; and the Papal powers and bodies have been divided among themselves, and will be again by-and-bye. "And the cities of the nation's fell," which cities I take to be professors, that they fall by apostasy, and so come into a state of deadly enmity against the people of God. "And great Babylon came in remembrance before God." How fast is Babylon swelling now; how wonderfully it is increasing! Look at the divisions, malice, and hatred among men of truth, for they all seem to hate each other; there is such hatred, such jealousy, and so much ill feeling. Of course Satan rejoices in this. When we see the abounding's of duty-faith, free-will, Catholicism it does seem to me that great Babylon, ripening for judgment, is most lamentably prosperous in this our civilized and enlightened day and age. Now, John saw all this; what a scene it must

have been! He was favored to see generation after generation, the convulsions and circumstances that were to take place down to the end of time. But, nevertheless, wrath awaits all those that are enemies to God. "And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." There is a little body of people holding the truth, presently off they go; there is a mountainous church-they look a mountain-that holds the truth; a little slippery work, and by degrees they move, and they are gone. There were seven churches in Asia; there are the islands. I do not take the islands here literally, but figuratively and mystically; nor does this mean the ultimate judgment, because in the ultimate judgment the globe itself will be burned up and the works therein. We must take the islands, therefore, mystically. See the seven churches; even in John's day five out of the seven were sliding off; by-and-bye away they go, and these islands have fled these mountains are not found. God grant that while these walls shall stand this little island of people may stand also fast in God's truth. If it were possible for me in fifty years' time to lift up my head from the grave, and to see that you were gone away in any measure from God's truth-I was going to say it would almost enrage me to come up out of my grave, and ask you what you were about. God grant, therefore, that you may not be one of these floating islands, but that you may prove that you are founded upon the rock; and then, when the rains descend, and the floods rise, and the winds of false doctrine blow, you will stand fast, and having done all, to stand against the wiles of the devil. So that I hope in a hundred years' time, if it be asked, where is the Surrey Tabernacle Island now? Where is the mountain now? the answer may be, Just where it was a hundred years ago; generation after generation has stood fast in the liberty of the gospel, in the vitality of the gospel, in the decision of the gospel, and this city is not fallen, this island is not fled away, this mountain is not overturned, but is one of the mountains of the promised land, like Mount Zion, which never, no, never can be removed. All these things John saw; perhaps I am hardly right in touching upon them, because I have not ability to set them forth in the striking way that they ought to be set forth in order to make our attention to these things profitable. And then, in the last verse, you have the consequences to natural men of the judgments of the great God. "And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great." Here if I were to touch upon this I should occupy a great deal more time than I have to spare. All of you are acquainted with the fact that Rome pagan, attributed all its calamities to Christianity. God poured out his judgments upon them, and they attributed their calamities to Christianity, and doing so they blasphemed God because of their troubles; instead of attributing their calamities to their own sins, they attributed their calamities to Christianity, and thus blasphemed God. And we cannot open a book of the travels of our missionaries in foreign parts, especially in the South Sea Islands, without reading a great deal about this; when any calamity comes, the first thing said is, "These missionaries are the cause of it." Hence so many of our missionaries have lost their lives, because the savages have imagined them to be the cause of the calamity. Thus men blaspheme God. Now the people of God may, as Job did under his troubles, in a measure rebel; but they will not blaspheme God. Satan said, "He will curse thee to thy face;" but Job did not curse God: he cursed the day of his birth, but he did not curse God. Thus, then, I think the mind of John must have been greatly solemnized when he thus saw the wrath of God in Satan's regions; when he thus saw these terrible convulsions by which the enemy should be destroyed, and by which the people of God should be profited; for "let Mount Zion rejoice because of thy judgments. " Whatever judgments may hang over this nation-and if judgments were to come upon us as bitter as they did upon the Jewish nation, and this land to be swept with the besom of destruction as that was, it would not touch you to hurt you; no, the Lord was a sanctuary to his people then, and he will always protect them that fear him.

But, lastly, I notice the testimony here given; "It is done." It is evident this must be understood judicially; but before entering into the judicial department I will just say a few words upon the gracious sense in which these words may be applied. "It is done," meaning, of course, that everything is settled. And you will find that this runs through the Scriptures, in accordance with the Saviour's dying words, "It is finished."

The prophet Isaiah was commissioned by the Holy Ghost to comfort the people of God with three things: first, the accomplishment of the warfare; second, the pardoning of iniquity; third, the substituting of the double in the place of all their sins; that double I apprehend meaning justification now, and glorification hereafter; "whom he justified, them he also glorified;" in other words, grace and glory. But a word upon the accomplished warfare. There is no less than a six fold sense in which the warfare is accomplished, in which it is done. First, mediatorially, and we bless the Lord that his work is done. Second, when a sinner's conquered, when a Saul of Tarsus is brought down, drops his dagger of enmity, turns his sword into a ploughshare, and his spear of deadly hate into a pruning-hook, and has not a word more to say, the warfare is accomplished. Third, there is Satan at Joshua's right hand; when the Lord steps in, puts Satan under his feet, commands a change of raiment, ministers pardoning mercy, Satan is defeated, the warfare is accomplished. Fourth, the termination of our troubles; they will all terminate to our advantage; the warfare is accomplished. And fifth, a dying hour; to die is gain; the warfare is accomplished. Sixth, at the last day, when the body shall rise from the dead, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The warfare is accomplished. All these things are virtually done. But the meaning in our text, I think, must be gathered from the last chapter of the book of Joel. You read there of "multitudes in the valley of decision;" the valley of Jehoshaphat means the valley of judgment, and the multitudes there I take to be the whole world; the whole world in the valley of decision; and so our text, therefore, means that God's decisions are unalterable. While meditating solemnly and closely upon this part of our subject, my heart went forth unexpectedly, I was going to say, in gratitude to God that while his decisions cannot be altered, men can be altered. What is his decision? "He that believeth shall be saved"; "it is done; he will never alter it. Saith one, I do not believe it. Bless the Lord, he can make you believe. Saith one, I do not seek after the Lord. But the Lord can make you. None of us once sought after him; therefore he saith of us, "I am found of them that sought not." Bless his holy name! He sought us. And "he that believeth not shall be damned;" it is done, that is God's decision, he will never alter it. Esau might weep, which he did, sought the blessing carefully with tears, but he was rejected. Why was he rejected? Why, with all his weeping, and all his repenting, and all his concern, he could not come into God's way of mercy; he hated Jacob and Jacob's God, he hated God's sovereignty, and therefore was rejected. This will bring me to a solemn ground, friends. I am afraid-yea, afraid did I say-it is a matter decided in the word of God, that "many shall seek," with tears too, with earnestness to, "to enter in, and shall not be able." There is God's decision. "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." And that belief means a belief in the testimony of Christ, and the testimony of Christ in relation to himself is that his work is entire; the testimony of Christ in relation to his people is that his sheep shall never perish; the testimony of Christ in relation to all his people is that he will present them faultless and without blame; the testimony of Christ is that his blood is the blood of the New Testament, that is, the new covenant, and that covenant is ordered in all things and sure; and if we believe not that, then we may seek with penance as they call it, and tears, and earnestness, but we shall never attain unless we seek him after the due order. "It is done"; there stands the decision. He will never make another gospel to accommodate the taste of men; he has revealed one gospel, and saith Peter, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," There is the decision; "It is done." Our text I am aware refers not only to this unalterable decision, but also to the judgments of God; they are all settled, all decided upon; that as the Saviour saith, "If ye believe not ye shall die in your sins." So I say then, friends, what a mercy for us that though the decision of the blessed God cannot be altered, men can be altered, that is by the Lord, or else it would indeed be in vain for us to preach. Let us go on then; the Lord enabling us, praying, and teaching and looking to the Lord for ourselves and for others, and rejoicing that while there are many unbelievers God can turn them into believers, and thus show mercy to those that have not yet obtained mercy.