SERMONS,

ADAPTED TO THE

CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT

OF

THE LORD’S SUPPER.

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BY

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SERMON II.

THE SWORD OF JEHOVAH SMITING HIS SHEPHERD.

Zechariah xiii. 7.

“Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts. Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered, and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.”

We have scriptural authority for applying this passage to the Lord Jesus. Indeed we have his own authority for so doing. In one of his last conversations with his disciples, he applies a part of it to himself. “All ye,” he says, “shall be offended because of me this night; for it is writ­ten, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad.”

We must consider, first, the description here given us of him; then, the command of Jehovah concerning him; and then, the consequences which are to follow the execution of this com­mand.

I. In looking at *the terms in which our Lord is here described,* we are struck at once with the natural manner in which they bring together his divine and human nature. He is exhibited to us at the same time in both these natures, and in such a way, as to make us feel that the Person speaking of him is in the habit of contemplating him in both.

And this mode of describing him is of frequent occurrence in the old testament. “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,” says Isaiah, but he is a child and a son with these lofty titles on him, “the everlasting Father, the mighty God.” He is “a righteous Branch raised unto David,” says Jeremiah; but the next moment he calls him “the Lord,” Jehovah. Micah tells us that he shall come forth from Bethlehem-Ephratah—he is to have an earthly origin; and then he ascribes to him immediately an eternal exist­ence; his “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” It seems as though the Holy Spirit exulted beforehand in that union of the two natures, which was to be accomplished in his person, and wished the ancient church also to foresee and exult in it.

Here he is described in the same two-fold cha­racter. He is a man, and yet “the man that is my Fellow,” saith the Lord of hosts.

“My Fellow”—the word signifies “My Equal and besides that, “My Companion, one near me, an equal by my side.” It is expressive of our Lord’s divine equality with the Father, and his eternal existence with him. It sets him forth as the sharer in his greatness, and happiness, and counsels, and operations, and purposes; one with him in all he is and does. It intimates exactly what St. John afterwards plainly declared con­cerning him, “The Word was with God and the Word was God.”

But he is man as well as God. Not however originally, naturally man, as he was God. Here is an anticipation of a character he afterwards took on him. He “was made flesh,” the scrip­ture says, made man; and this not by putting off his divine nature, but by taking our human nature into union with it; becoming “God and man in one Christ.”

And this assumption of our nature was neces­sary for the work of suffering he had to go through. As God, he is above all suffering, “God blessed for ever.” In this character, no sword could reach him. No pang, no sorrow, could ever enter his happy mind. To come within reach of such things as these, he must take on him a creature’s nature; and as we were the creatures he was to suffer for, it pleased him to take on him ours. “Forasmuch as the children are par­takers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” And he did this for the express purpose of suffering for us. The Father did not put him in our form, and then determine that he should die for us; he determined that he should die for us, and then he clothed him in our form. “He sent his Son,” sent him into our world, made him flesh and blood as we are, “that he might be the propitiation for our sins.”

And in this human nature, he is set forth in the text under a third character. He is a Shep­herd, and “My Shepherd,” says Jehovah.

Here the Lord views him in relation to his church. He is God in himself and man in him­self. He would be both were he alone in the universe. But speak of him in this new charac­ter, and you bring others immediately upon the scene, and connect him with them.

He is called the Shepherd of his people, be­cause the charge of his people devolves upon him; because he performs towards them a shepherd’s part, watching over, providing for, and guiding them. And he is called God’s Shepherd, because the flock under his charge is God’s flock; a flock committed to him by God, to be rendered back by him to God again. Willingly, joyfully did he take the oversight of it, but he did not put himself into the office; he was appointed to it by his Father; so that when we view him as the Shepherd, “the good Shepherd,” “the great Shepherd of the sheep,” we have not only his goodness and greatness to rejoice in, we may look higher, if higher we can look; we may regard him as holding a lofty commission from his Father to watch over and care for us; as impelled to act towards us a Shepherd’s part, not simply by his own love for us, though surely that were enough, but by the love and obedience he owes to him who appointed him. “I will save my flock,” says the Lord by his prophet Ezekiel; and how? “I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David,” the son of David; “he shall feed them and he shall be their Shepherd.” Happy they, brethren, who are fed by him! He leads them often into strange paths, and gives them at times strange food; but there is not one among them who is not thankful to be under his care; not one who would not say, “I must be happy here or happy no where.”

II. Let us look now at *the command given by Jehovah* in the text with reference to this glorious Shepherd.

It is couched, you observe, like much of sacred prophecy, in figurative and highly poetic lan­guage. The Lord places himself on the throne of a king or the seat of a magistrate, as he utters it. Now they who bear these offices, have often a sword near them as an emblem of their autho­rity, and moreover, if need be, a ready instrument to execute any sentence they may pass on the guilty. Here the Lord describes himself as sud­denly addressing the sword near him, and calling on it to smite, not the guilty, but his own high, dear, holy Son, “the man of his right hand;” and this, observe, in the very character he has put upon him, while executing the very office he has given him. “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, against the man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts. Smite the Shepherd.” A solemn command, brethren, and solemn indeed are the truths involved in it.

1. We see in it that the sufferings of our Lord were *divinely appointed,* all ordered and fore­ordained by his Father. The persecuting Jews indeed were willing agents in all they did against him. They did it as voluntarily as ever men did anything; and they were as guilty in all they did, as though none but themselves had ought to do with it. But what were they? Scripture tells us what they were—instruments to do “whatsoever God’s hand and God’s counsel had determined before to be done.” “That sword is mine,” Jehovah says, “that dreadful sword which is now piercing the heart of my beloved Son. It was I who awoke it. I gave it its commission to strike. You look on those Jews and tremble as you look on them, and well you may tremble; but I want you to look higher; to see my hand guiding the weapon they are so frantically wielding; to see me over­ruling their madness, and accomplishing by it my own purposes. I have said, the wrath of man shall praise me, and there it is in its fury praising me in the highest. It is laying a foundation for the loftiest praise I shall ever have. Think not that the hand of man could bring that mighty Sufferer to that cross. No; I have sent him there; he is smitten of me and afflicted.”

And our Lord himself seems to have had this truth ever in his mind. In referring to this very prophecy, he alters it, as though unconsciously, making it declare in explicit terms that it was his Father who should smite him; and just before he came to the cross, he calls the bitter cup he was about to drink on it, a cup which his Father had given him.

2. Here too we see that the sufferings of our Lord were *most severe.*

We might infer this from the truth we have just noticed. Man can inflict much misery; it is astonishing how much; but still man’s power to afflict is limited. When God therefore calls off our attention from man as the author of our Lord’s sufferings, and directs it to himself, we feel at once that our Lord must be a most severe sufferer. He is enduring misery, we see, greater than man ever could inflict, a misery that is the work of a stronger arm.

But the language of the text conveys this idea yet more forcibly. It is a sword the Lord calls up against his Son; not a rod to scourge or even a rack to torture, but the magistrate’s last, most fearful, his fatal weapon—a sword to destroy. And the command given to this sword is not “Wound,” but “Smite;” strike hard; let the blow be mortal.

And mark that word “awake.” It seems to imply that up to this hour, the sword of Jehovah had been sleeping; that his justice had never yet been fully called into action; never yet had come forth in its strength or appeared in its great­ness. It had cast sinning angels down into hell; for four thousand years it had visited this sinning earth with judgments, turning its paradise into a desert, now raining down fire from heaven upon its cities, and now covering the whole face of it with the waters of the deep; but all this it had done, as it were, slumbering. Now it is to awake, to rise up in its vigour and majesty. An object worthy of it is before it—the man that is Jehovah’s Fellow; a man who can bear a blow, and a man who has taken the sins of guilty millions upon him, almost demanding a blow;—it is to strike in the greatness of its strength. “Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord,” cry the Jews in their captivity in Babylon; and they explain what they mean by the word—they want that arm, they say, to “put on its strength,” to work wonders of power for their deliverance. So here the Lord calls on his sword to awake, to smite with its full force a blow of wonderful vengeance.

3. And this text represents our Lord’s suffer­ings as *surprising.* Indeed the description it gives us of him, seems given us for the very pur­pose of exciting our surprise at them. “Awake, O sword,” the Lord says—against whom? The very Being whom of all others we should have ex­pected him to shield from every sword; the Being who is the nearest and dearest to him; the man that is his Fellow.

And not only this, twice over he tells us that he is his Shepherd; one whom he has placed over his beloved flock and constituted the great keeper and guardian of it.

And to add to our surprise, the Lord seems to afflict him not reluctantly, but willingly; yea, more than willingly, almost eagerly. “Awake, O sword,” he says, as though he were glad of this opportunity of smiting him, in haste to seize it; and determined that it shall not be lost. And why this? Shall we say that he is a vindictive God, taking pleasure in suffering? O no, bre­thren. This is the old pagan notion. We dis­claim it with abhorrence.

And yet we may say, there is no doubt but that the Lord is well pleased in this thing “for his righteousness’ sake.” He delights in the con­templation and display of all his perfections, and this august display of his justice in the sufferings of his Son, is doubtless pleasurable to his holy mind. But we must trace the eager language he utters here, to another source.

He is pre-eminently a God of love. Love rules within him. It is the spring of all he does and all he says. He speaks even in this awful text under its influence. It is this, which impels him to call so abruptly on his sword to smite. His justice indeed is to give the blow, but it is love that wakes up his justice and bids it strike. So says the scripture; “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation,” a smitten sacrifice, “for our sins.” “He loved us”—us poor, miser­able, perishing sinners—there all began; that led him to send down his glorious Fellow from his side, and place him in a mortal form in our world. “He loved us,” and because he loved us, he was delighted to find, though at his own cost, a victim to suffer for us; and though that victim was his own dear Son, he “spared him not;” he de­livered him up for us; he was well pleased when he saw him bound to the altar, and stricken and slain. “It pleased the Lord,” the prophet says, “to bruise him and put him to grief; “and why did it please him? Because, he immediately intimates, in so doing he made “his soul an offer­ing for sin;” he vindicated by the grief he put him to, the honour of his insulted law, and thus opened a way for the indulgence of his love towards the sinners who had insulted it. Their salvation con­stitutes what the prophet goes on to call “the pleasure of the Lord,’’ the highest pleasure his happy soul knows; and because of this pleasure, he is said to be pleased with, to take a pleasure in. the sufferings that accomplish this salvation.

We can sometimes rejoice in the cross we bear, when we recollect the advantages we shall get from bearing it; and undoubtedly the Lord him­self rejoices as he puts our crosses on us and thinks of the blessings which, through his grace, they will work for us. Just so he rejoiced when he laid that heavy cross on his Son. He calls eagerly and joyfully on his sword to smite, knowing that as it smites, it will not only glorify his justice, but magnify his mercy; opening by one blow his kingdom and presence to banished millions, and placing “salvation in Zion for Israel his glory.”

And thus the mystery that hangs over the com­mand before us, is partially cleared away. More of it will go, as we look at—

III. *The consequences which are to follow the execution of this command.* These are two.

1. One of them is exactly that which we might have expected. The Shepherd is to be smitten— he to whose sole care Jehovah has entrusted his flock; and the sheep, frightened by the violence they have seen done to him, and driven hither and thither by their enemies, are to be scattered. And so it happened. This prediction was fulfilled to the very letter. No sooner was the sword actually lifted up to descend on our Lord, than his whole church fell, as it were, to pieces; it was scattered to the winds. “All his disciples,” we are told, “forsook him and fled.”

And thus the Lord in his wisdom often allows things to take, for a time, what we call their natural course in his church. He seems to forget his own purposes; nay, to undo his own work, to frustrate his own designs; and still more, to place the accomplishment of those designs apparently beyond possibility. He wants his sheep, wandering about our world, sought and saved; gathered to­gether, watched over, and led to his kingdom; but there lies the Shepherd who is to do this, slaugh­tered, and slaughtered at his command. And where is the flock he had begun to form? It is “scattered because there is no shepherd; “it is wandering again on the mountains with none to “search or seek after it.” But this does not last long.

2. The smiting of this Shepherd is to be followed by a signal interposition of Jehovah in behalf of his scattered sheep. “I will turn my hand,” he says, “upon the little ones.”

“The little ones”—an expression of pity and affection, such as a father might use if he saw his children in alarm and danger. It represents to us the feeble and helpless condition of our Lord’s followers at the time of his crucifixion. They are as the young lambs of a flock, shivering before the blast; unable to endure its violence, and knowing not where to look for a shelter from it.

“I will turn my hand upon them,” the Lord says. He had just turned his hand against their Shepherd, but that was his strange, his unac­customed work; and the blow being struck, the sword the next moment drops, and his arm is turned another way for another purpose. The God of love appears again in his accustomed cha­racter, as a God of love; is occupied again in his accustomed work. His hand is stretched out with eager haste towards his scattered sheep. It is “upon them,” the text says, not helping them at a distance, but reaching them, holding them, and working effectually for them. He becomes a present and “very present help” to them in their “time of trouble.” “I have smitten your Shep­herd," he says, “but fear not, little flock; you are still safe. I will supply his place. He bequeathed you to me before he suffered; you heard him implore me to keep you through my name when he was gone; and keep you I will. No power in earth or hell shall harm you. You shall want nothing that this strong arm of mine can do or give.”

And well was this pledge redeemed. These ti­mid disciples of our Lord were strangely kept to­gether, in spite of their unbelief and fears, after his crucifixion, and sheltered from every danger. And we know what the early church soon became. It was a wonder in the world, itself doing wonders. His hand was indeed upon his little ones, glo­riously, visibly upon them; and, blessed be his name! it has been upon them ever since. He has sought “that which was lost, and brought again that which was driven away;” and placing again his recovered sheep under their former Shepherd, he has fed them “in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel” has their fold been. He has made their condition in this evil world, as safe as though there were not an evil in it, and, one by one, he is filling with them his own heaven.

We have now to look at the practical purposes to which we may turn this text.

It may serve, first, perhaps *to strengthen our faith in the holy scriptures.* And in saying this, I do not allude to the predictions we find in it, which were afterwards so exactly fulfilled. I refer rather to that beautiful harmony of thought and expression, which exists between this verse of the old testament and another passage of the new.

There is an extraordinary blending together here of apparently contradictory things—the man­hood of our Lord and his Godhead—his office as a Shepherd, and yet his death while filling this office—the danger of his infant church, and, at the same time, its security. Now turn to the tenth chapter of St. John. It contains precisely these same things, blended together in the same strange way. “The man that is my Fellow,” says Jehovah here; “I and my Father are one,” says Christ there. “My Shepherd,” says Jehovah again; “I am the good Shepherd,” answers Christ. “Smite the Shepherd,” the Lord says here; “I am the good Shepherd that giveth his life for the sheep,” says Christ there. “I will turn my hand upon the little ones,” is Jehovah’s promise in this place; and what says Christ in that? “My sheep shall never perish. No man shall pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd,” cries the Father, as though he were impatient to have his Shepherd smitten; “Therefore doth my Father love me,” says the smitten Jesus, “because I lay down my life.”

Now account for this similarity, brethren. It cannot possibly be artificial or designed. It is not enough on the surface for that. It is a similarity of thought and feeling, which art could not reach. There is only one way of accounting for it—both these scriptures came from the same source; they emanated from the same mind. This Jesus of the new testament, and this Lord of hosts of the old, are one and the same Being. This holy book is true. It is what it professes to be, the word of the living God.

Here too we are taught again *the fearful evil* *of sin.*

There are moments, Christian brethren, when we can scarcely read this text without an inward shudder—it exhibits the great Jehovah to us in a character so awful, and in an attitude so dismay­ing. He is represented as an offended Judge, calling for and eager for the sacrifice of his own dear Son. And yet we know that he is the same God who holds himself forth to us as “very pitiful and of tender mercy;” “the Father of mercies;” one who “delighteth in mercy the kindest, tenderest of all beings. And such as he thus describes himself to be, we have found him to be. Words could not tell the goodness, the grace, the love, we have received at his hands. What then must that evil be, which can place such a Being before us in such a light as this—a God of love taking the character and speaking the language of a God of wrath!

Some of you, brethren, as you hear this, may turn away and say in your hearts, it is all nothing; but a man in his right mind would not say so with you to gain a world. The evil of sin is a reality; the divine justice is a reality, as much so us the divine mercy; the inflexible, unbending cha­racter of God’s law is a reality; his determination to punish every breach of it everywhere through­out his wide universe is a reality. The cross of Jesus Christ proclaims all these things to be most solemn realities. It tells you that you will one day have to do with the God that made you, as a Lawgiver and Judge, as surely as you have to do with him now as a Preserver and Benefactor. O for pity’s sake, do not meet him in this character unprepared. Acknowledge him in this character, bend down before him in this character, now. Even as a Lawgiver and a Lawgiver you have offended, he is full of mercy towards you. This very text tells you he is. What would have been more easy to him than to have pointed long ago to this world of sinners, and bidden his sword strike here? One blow of it would have destroyed us all. But he turned that dreadful sword another way. To save this world of sinners, he bid it strike his holy Son. And now he has struck him, he sets him forth to us as a great propitiation for our great sins. We are as free to use him as such, to apply for and obtain a full forgiveness through him, as we are to breathe. But ask yourselves, brethren, and ask it again, and never cease asking it to your dying day, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”

We may see lastly here *the perfect safety of all who are indeed resting for safety on our crucified Lord.*

You, brethren, have nothing to fear from this awful God. In the greatness of him whom he here commands to be smitten for you, you may see the sufficiency, the completeness, and more than that—the grandeur and glory, of the atone­ment he has made for your sins. The holy impa­tience the Lord here manifests for the accomplish­ment of this atonement, may show you something of the complacency and satisfaction with which he now regards it. It cleanses “from all sin.” It has not left on you, if you are indeed the true followers of Jesus Christ, a spot or a stain. While it brings delight unutterable to Jehovah’s mind, it brings to your guilty souls a full remission. The throne of judgment indeed still exists. It is “established for ever in the heavens,” and in the heavens it will stand for ever firm. But it is be­come to you a throne of grace. A sword there may be still in the hand of him who sits on it, and a sword he will not bear in vain, but you will never feel it. He is no Judge, or if a Judge, he is a satisfied Judge, he is a Father and Friend, to you; and his hand will be upon you only for good.

But how difficult is it sometimes, brethren, to believe all this! or though we believe it, how diffi­cult to realize it, to feel its truth! Other men will not regard .Jehovah’s displeasure against sin as real; we are often as unwilling or unable to regard our justification before him as real. But what is the gospel for, what are our sabbaths for, what are our sacraments for, but, among other purposes, for this—to bring the full remission, the sure salvation that is in Christ Jesus, before our minds and bid us rejoice in it? May the God of all grace enable you to rejoice in it today! As you look on the emblems of his wounded and bruised, his smitten Son at his table, adore him, stand in awe of him—this text and that table itself plainly call on you to do this—but they say as plainly, Trust him; hope in him; let your spirit rejoice in him as God your Saviour. He was angry with you, but his anger is turned away; it is past and gone. He has sworn that he will not be wroth with you any more. And what says the great “Shepherd and Bishop” of your souls, he who is again by his side and knows his purposes? “Fear not, little flock,” he says, “it is my Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”