

SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY, BRECKNOCKSHIRE; AND MINISTER OF

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM, SURREY.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1833.

SERMON VI.

THE REDEEMED SINNER JOINING HIMSELF IN A COVENANT WITH GOD.

JEREMIAH 1. 5.

Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

IN our intercourse with the world, such language as this seldom reaches our ears or proceeds from our lips. But a kinder invitation could not possibly be addressed to us; nor could we offer to those whom we love, more friendly advice. The prophet ascribes it, in the first instance, to the children of Israel and Judah, as they were commencing their journey from Babylon to their own land. Previously to their captivity, there had existed between these two nations an inveterate enmity; but a fellowship in the same afflictions had materially softened it, and now, by a participation in the same deliverance, it was entirely removed. They are described in the passage connected with the text, as a company of liberated captives, forgetting in the emotions of penitence and joy every animosity, and testifying the sincerity of their reconciliation by urging each other to an immediate and entire dedication of themselves to their redeeming God. "In those days and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

Regarded in a spiritual light, the words of the prophet lead us to enquire, first, why the Almighty condescends to enter into a covenant with his redeemed people; and, secondly, what is implied in their joining themselves to him in a covenant.

I. Our first subject of consideration must not however be entered on with rashness; for who are we, that we should presume to be acquainted with the designs, and account for the actions, of an incomprehensible God? An inspired apostle, when contemplating the wonders of his grace, soon found the subject too vast for even his powerful mind to grasp it, and was constrained to end the most comprehensive description of the gospel that was ever penned, with a declaration of the infinite greatness of Jehovah, and his own utter inability to fathom his judgments; "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord; or who hath been his counsellor?"

But while a recollection of the divine greatness should restrain every presumptuous effort to be "wise above that which is written," it ought not to deter us from endeavouring to learn all that this unsearchable God has revealed of himself and his ways in his holy word. May he give to us now a serious and humble mind, and enable us to discover some of the wise and gracious motives, which have made him

so willing to enter into a covenant with the worthless sinners whom he has redeemed!

We all know what is meant by a covenant. It is an agreement between two or more parties, by which each binds himself to the performance of certain promises on certain conditions. Such an agreement did the Lord enter into with Adam in his state of innocence. He promised to him and his posterity a continuance of the happiness he enjoyed, on the condition of perfect obedience on his part to the law which he had given him. It is evident however that this cannot be the covenant which God is now ready to form with us. Sin has altered the condition of man, and rendered him totally unable to offer to God any compensation for his benefits. No compensation therefore is required of him. The covenant into which he is now invited to enter, is a new covenant of grace; a collection of exceeding great and precious promises, by which the Most High engages to bestow on his people all the blessings of salvation on this one condition, if such it may be called, that they believe him to be able and willing to bestow them. Mere promises however do not content him. He binds himself by the most solemn engagements to receive every sinner who comes to him in the name of his crucified Son, to pardon his iniquities, to restore him again to his favour, to write his holy laws in his heart, to give him all that he needs during his pilgrimage on earth, and to take him at the end of it to his own heavenly kingdom.

1. He has thus pledged himself to his people *to show how greatly he honours them.*

“Since thou wast precious in my sight,” says he to his church, “thou hast been honourable;” and he appears determined that all the universe shall see the honour with which he has covered them. Though they can offer him nothing in return for all his benefits, though they are sunk so low as to be unworthy to lift up their eyes unto the heaven where he dwells, yet he deals with them as though he greatly valued their services, and deemed them worthy to treat with him, and to stand in a near and endearing relation to him. Hence he often represents the mercies he bestows on them, as the rewards of their obedience, and calls them, in his covenant, his friends and his children. The name of sinners seems to be almost erased from the charter of their privileges, and the name of “the sons of God” written in its stead.

2. This gracious God has entered into a covenant with his people, that *he may bind them more closely to himself.*

He well knows how unstable our hearts are; how prone we are to wander from him, and to return to our former captivity. He therefore binds us to himself by a covenant which he causes each of us, personally and for himself, to enter into with him. Thus he has not only a claim on us as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; we are his by a voluntary surrender of ourselves to him, by our own bond and obligation, by promises and vows.

In his address to the Jews after their public dedication of themselves to the God of their fathers, Moses repeatedly reminds them of this bond of union between them and the Lord; and in the conclusion of the twenty-sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, we find him telling them, that Jehovah had formed a covenant with them for the express purpose of putting an honour upon their nation, and sanctifying them to himself; “The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised

thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.”

3. But the chief reason why it has pleased God to enter into a covenant with his servants, is this—to *show them the sureness of his mercy*, the certainty of their receiving pardon, grace, and salvation, at his hands.

It might indeed have been supposed that the promise of an unchangeable God was a sufficient foundation for the confidence of his creatures; but he knows the difficulty with which our unbelieving hearts are brought to give credit to his word, and in compassion to the sinful infirmity which dishonours him, he has condescended to add to his promises the sanction of an oath. “Men verily swear by the greater,” says Saint Paul, “and an oath for confirmation, is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

The penitent sinner therefore, when he flies for refuge to the atoning Saviour, is not left to mere conjecture. There is something more than a possibility or probability of his salvation. The covenant of God makes it certain. He needs not say with the repentant king of Nineveh, “Who can tell if God will turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” but he may say with the prophet, “Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” He may take up the words of the confiding Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him, against that day.” He is warranted, not only to hope in the mercy of the Lord, but to rejoice in his truth, and to plead his faithfulness at his throne. He still stands at the door of heaven as a beggar, but then he is a beggar whose wants the Master of the house has pledged himself to supply, and whom he cannot suffer to perish without tarnishing the lustre of his own holy name.

II. Such are some of the reasons which may have induced the Almighty to enter into a covenant with the sinners whom he has ransomed. Let us now proceed to enquire *what is implied in their availing themselves of his condescension, and joining themselves to him in a covenant.*

It is plain that this act of dedication is something of an inward and spiritual nature, rather than an outward act. It is true that baptism and the sacrament of the Lord’s supper are symbols and seals of the covenant, but it is equally true that we may be baptized in the name of Jesus, and be frequent guests at his table, and yet have formed no alliance with God, and have no interest in the most gracious of his promises. These rites are useful and solemn; so useful, that no good man will neglect them, and so solemn, that no wise man will speak lightly of them; but what is the value of these ordinances, if there are no corresponding feelings in the heart? if there is no spiritual transaction between the soul and its God? They are useless. They are not acceptable to God, and bring down no blessing on our heads.

1. The spiritual union spoken of in the text implies, first, *a renunciation of every covenant which is opposed to this covenant with God.*

We have all many covenants of this nature to break through. We have all joined ourselves to Satan, unconsciously perhaps, but sincerely and closely. We have sold ourselves to sin, and have long been doing its works, and receiving in return its pleasures. As for the world, our consciences tell us that it has been our god. It has claimed us as its own, and we have admitted the claim. We have given it our warmest affections, our most unwearied services. We have consented to conform to its laws, to act upon its principles, to court its smiles, to dread its frowns. To enter into covenant with God implies therefore, that we renounce the devil and all his works; that we begin to hate and strive against the lusts of the flesh; that we rise superior to all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and resolve to be no more governed by its laws. It implies an utter abhorrence of these tyrants of the soul; a restless anxiety to escape from their thralldom; a willingness to endure any hardship, to encounter any risk, so that we may “break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

2. But before we can enter into covenant with God, we must proceed a step farther, and *accede to the terms of his covenant*; we must obtain a scriptural knowledge of them, approve, and embrace them.

Now these terms are so simple, that a child may comprehend them; and so gracious, that they fill the minds of angels with wonder; but because they are opposed to the imaginations of our depraved hearts, thousands daily reject them, and perish rather than accept them. The fact is, that in his new covenant of grace, God deals with man as a destitute, helpless beggar; and man will not bear to be thus dealt with even by the great God. He could bear to be treated as a sinner, and would, in many instances, be willing to pay the price of repentance and tears for his pardon; yea, when he feels the terrors of an awakened conscience, he would give his “first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul;” but to be addressed as one who is altogether worthless, as one who, in the expressive language of the Spirit, is “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”—this is too humiliating for haughty man to endure. He rejects with scorn the mercies so degradingly offered him, and determines to obtain pardon and heaven in some other way, or perish in the attempt. And in such an attempt he must inevitably perish. God will confer the precious blessings of his gospel only on his own terms. Though he has manifested the riches of his grace in offering to enter into covenant with sinners, yet by fixing unalterably the terms of this covenant, he has preserved his own honour, and acted with the dignity and sovereignty becoming the great Lord of all.

And what are the terms which man so much despises, and to which the Holy One of Israel so steadfastly adheres? They are so gracious, that if we were in our right mind, we should leap with joy as we hear them. This is the language of the covenant, “He that believeth shall be saved.” It asks of us no merit; it demands of the penitent sinner no righteousness. It tells him to cast away all dependence upon every thing that he can feel, or suffer, or do; and upon this one condition, that he heartily believes and embraces the promises of the gospel, it assures him that all the blessings of the everlasting covenant are his. When therefore the soul, wounded with a sense of its guilt, and deeply conscious of its inability to deliver itself from its miseries, wearied with its efforts to establish its own righteousness, and longing for a righteousness such as God can approve—when the soul thus comes and casts

itself on the free mercy of the Lord in Christ Jesus, pleading only the merit of his blood, and regarding him as its almighty and willing Saviour, in that moment a covenant of peace is entered into between the sinner and his God, a covenant which will never be forgotten and cannot be destroyed.

3. And what follows? Is the believing sinner henceforth at liberty to live as he will? to be disobedient and lawless? No, brethren; the man who flies to the gospel as a refuge from his iniquities, is the only man in the world, who is really mindful of the obedience he owes to the Being who formed him. As he joins himself in a covenant to his redeeming Lord, *he gives himself up entirely and for ever to his service.*

This self-dedication is the necessary consequence of the faith which has made him an heir of the promises. By the powerful energy of this faith, the enslaving influence of the world and worldly things is overcome; the heart is purified; its affections are withdrawn from the objects which before engaged and defiled them, and fixed on that infinitely holy Being from whom they ought never to have wandered. "Faith worketh by love." It produces in the soul an overpowering sense of its vast obligations to its pardoning God. It fills the heart with the tenderest emotions, as it thinks of the riches of his goodness; and it kindles a love for him, which constrains the sinner to fall down before him and say, "Truly, O Lord, I am thy servant; I am thy servant; for thou hast loosed my bonds."

Neither is it a partial surrender of himself, which he thus makes. God would not receive it if it were. Though he is a God of incomprehensible grace, he is still an awfully jealous God, and will not bear a rival even in a human heart. He knows indeed how to bear with the corruptions of that heart; he can patiently endure its occasional wanderings, and pity even its sinful infirmities; but its supreme affections must be habitually his, or he will not regard the sinner as his own. The Christian therefore, when he devotes himself to him, makes an entire surrender of all he is, and all he has, to his service. He henceforth regards nothing as his own. His time, his substance, his influence, all the members of his body and all the faculties of his soul, are viewed in a new light, as the property of God. He before did with them whatsoever he would; but now he regards them as talents entrusted to him by their great Proprietor, and he employs them to his glory.

He determines also to cleave for ever to the Lord. "Come," said the ransomed Israelites, "and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten;" and, in a limited sense, they have kept this covenant. Before their captivity, they were continually forsaking the God of their fathers and bowing the knee to idols; but never, since the words before us passed their lips at the gates of Babylon, have they as a nation worshipped strange gods. Dispersed throughout all the civilized world, living among idolaters of every class, and often cruelly persecuted for their attachment to their ancient faith, they have notwithstanding never fallen into the gross idolatry to which they were once so prone, and are at this very hour acknowledging no other God but the living Lord. If such people then, in the midst of such heavy judgments, have remained so faithful to their vows, how close, how constant, how permanent, ought that union to be, which exists between the redeemed sinner and his God! And it will be permanent, brethren, wherever it is real. He who sincerely devotes himself to the Lord, and is once brought within the

bond of his everlasting covenant will never be suffered wholly to depart from him. He may be prone to leave him, and may for a season partially forsake him; but by his Spirit and his word, by judgments and afflictions, the Lord will bring back his erring servant, remind him of his forgotten vows, and bind him by the bitterness of his wanderings more closely to his throne. "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

The subject which has thus occupied our thoughts, is calculated to afford admonition to us all. It calls upon *those who have already joined themselves to the Lord*, to meditate on their privileges, and to seek for a more enlarged view of their value and stability. They are more precious than their hearts have ever yet conceived, and more than the stars of heaven in multitude. They are secured to them also by promises, by a covenant and oath, which leave them no ground for apprehension, no room for despondency, no excuse for unbelief.

But privileges, brethren, always bring duties with them. The covenant which assures you that all the blessings of time and eternity are yours, lays you under peculiar obligations to cherish the liveliest feelings of thankfulness, of love, of submission, of the most entire devotedness to the will of God. You are bound by your own vows, as well as by the exceeding riches of his grace, to do whatever he commands, to renounce whatever he forbids, to be grateful for whatever he bestows, to be content whatever he may withhold, and submissive whatever he may take away. How have these obligations been fulfilled? Look back to the day in which you first joined yourselves to God, and enquire whether your conduct since has corresponded with the promises and resolutions you then made. O what a humbling retrospect! What cause have you for shame, and humiliation, and wonder! And why have your deficiencies been so many and so great? Why are you so often forced to mourn over your sins, instead of rejoicing in your mercies? Because you have forgotten that you are the Lord's; because you have regarded yourselves as your own, instead of his chosen heritage, his purchased people, his covenanted servants. Strive then to forget his love and your own vows no more. He is ever mindful of his covenant; be you also mindful of it. In every hour of temptation, in every season of declension, in every time of trouble, say to your soul what David said to his, "O my soul, I have said unto the Lord, Thou art my God."

There are others perhaps among us, *who are desirous of joining themselves to God*. They have tried the service of sin, and have found in it nothing but disappointment, vexation, and bitterness. They are therefore anxious to renounce it; indeed they have already renounced it, and are determined to be the willing slaves of sin no more. But they have not yet given themselves up to God. Not that they are reluctant to forsake the world, or unwilling to bear the reproach of Christ. A sense of unworthiness keeps them back. In their present sinful and wretched state, they dare not lay hold on his covenant, nor take to his altar so vile an offering as their broken hearts. But is not your unworthiness known unto God? And was it not known by

him from everlasting? And yet he invites you in his word to devote yourselves to him, and promises to receive and bless you. Polluted and desperately wicked as he sees you to be, he calls you by the endearing name of sons, and says to each of you with a voice of the tenderest mercy, "Give me thine heart." "I know its vileness. I know all the evil which has defiled, and all the wickedness which has hardened it. I have seen its folly in the days of thy childhood, and its thoughtlessness in thy youth; its pride in thy prosperity, and its rebellion in thine affliction. They have tried my patience to the uttermost, and I remember them still. But, O my son, give me thine heart. Only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against me; only consent to receive pardon at my hands, through the blood of the covenant; and I will be faithful and just to forgive thee thy sins, and to cleanse thee from all unrighteousness.' 'Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, and wearied me with thine iniquities; but I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' 'Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' 'Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.'"

Others among us may have broken the covenant of the Lord. There was a time when they appeared to be seeking his favour. They wept as they thought of their sins, their hearts were affected as they heard of his love. They openly confessed his name, and went up to the house of God with his people as friends. But how are they changed! Their eye has now forgotten to weep, and their heart to mourn. The cares and pleasures of the world have driven the remembrance of a crucified Saviour out of their minds, and are reigning in all their former power over their souls. Prayer is neglected, the Bible is seldom searched, ordinances are slighted, heaven is but little desired, and hell but little dreaded. They have still perhaps "a name to live," but, in the sight of God, they are dead.

Your situation, brethren, is most perilous. There is more hope of the thoughtless sabbath breaker, the dissipated trifler, the drunkard, than of you. The convictions you have stifled, have hardened your hearts; the despite you have done to the Spirit of grace, has caused him to abandon you to a fearful insensibility; the vows you have broken and forgotten, are all registered in heaven, and have a vengeance connected with them, which is ready to burst upon your heads.

And dare you talk, in such a situation as this, of the everlasting covenant of grace, and harbour the presumptuous hope that so holy a covenant can ensure the salvation of a proud, worldly-minded, sensual despiser of the Lord? Then listen to the solemn declarations of the Spirit; "The just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "Thus saith the Lord God, As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

But even while these awful sayings are sounding in your ears, sayings which seem to close for ever the door of mercy, we are warranted to hold out to you an offer of pardon. Though even in your best days you “lied unto God with your tongues, your heart was not right with him, neither were you steadfast in his covenant; and though you have since incurred a guilt which the angels who are accursed for ever, never knew; yet if you tear out of your soul its bold presumption, smite upon your breast, and lift up a prayer for mercy, the blood on which you have trampled, will cleanse you from all your sins, even from the sins which have dishonoured him who shed it; the Spirit whom you have grieved, will take up his abode in your hearts, will soften, purify, and heal them; the God whom you have forsaken, will receive you to his favour, and, in the end, to his kingdom, his house, and his arms. “A voice,” says the prophet, “was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel; for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God.” And what is the message which is sent to this mourning people? “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will heal your backslidings; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep mine anger for ever.”

But there is yet another and a more numerous class of persons among us—*they who have never joined themselves to the Lord, and never thought of his covenant*. It may be true, brethren, that the guilt of apostasy rests not on your head; that you have never been hypocritical professors of religion, and never broken the vows which you have vowed unto the Lord. You may have this ground for boasting; but O what a dreadful boast! To have lived all your days upon the bounty of God, and yet never to have even professed to love him! to have heard year after year the invitations of his grace, and yet to have never thought of accepting them! to know that there is a God of infinite power and goodness, and to have no connection with him, no access to him, no desire of his favour, no fear of his vengeance!—if a dying sinner can glory in folly such as this, who does not wonder and tremble? In what will this madness end? The day of judgment will show. In that great and terrible day, the Lord God Almighty will vindicate his claim to the creatures whom his hands have made; will assert his despised authority; will force the haughtiest to humble themselves before him, and the proudest to lick the dust. And what will your vain boasting avail you then, and what your carelessness profit you? No more than his former songs of mirth avail the mariner whose vessel is sinking in the waves; or the slumbers of midnight profit the man whose habitation is in flames.

Acknowledge then the Lord to be your God. By an immediate surrender of yourselves to his authority, and a humble appeal to his mercy in Christ Jesus, escape the wrath to come; lay hold of his great salvation; obtain an interest in his love. Come, ye who are afar off, and by that “new and living way” which he has opened, draw nigh unto the Lord. Come, ye who have forsaken him, and taste again that he is gracious. Come, ye who are enquiring after him weeping, and dare to hope in his mercy. Come, ye who have found him, and renew your covenant with him. Come, and let us all seek the same Lord, ask the way to the same Zion, share the same griefs, sing the same songs, bear the same cross, glory in the same reproach, and bind ourselves as a living sacrifice to “the horns of the altar “of the same God.