

SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

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SERMON XVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WAITING FOR HIS DELIVERER.

1 THESSALONIANS i. 10.

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come.

THE most delightful and encouraging subject on which a sinner can fix his thoughts, is the over-flowing mercy of his offended God. The sinner however, who has any saving interest in this mercy, will be often thinking of the awful justice of the Being from whom he has received it, and the fearfulness of that wrath from which it has rescued him. Indeed no one can think aright of the divine mercy, who has not adequate conceptions of the divine justice; nor shall we ever value the blessings of salvation, till we have learned to keep alive in our minds a deep sense of the terrors of condemnation. Thus, in the passage before us, a longing after the coming of the Saviour, and an expectation of heaven, are connected with the recollection of danger escaped and wrath incurred. The apostle knew that the Thessalonians were delivered from this wrath; their conduct left him no room to doubt it; and yet though heaven was before them, he still reminds them of “the terrors of the Lord,” and of the close connection which once existed between them and destruction. “They show of us,” he says, “what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

The subject to which these words direct our attention, is peculiarly important and solemn. No subject can be more so. May the Holy Spirit give us a serious and prayerful mind while we are meditating on it.

I. Let us consider, first, *the wrath* of which the apostle here speaks. It is “wrath to come.”

Now this is an evil, brethren, which some of us dread but little, but which none of us can dread too much. Poverty, pain, sickness, and death, will not bear to be compared with it; and as for annihilation, the total destruction of our being, the evil from which nature most shrinks, it would be a blessing if it could be exchanged for it.

1. For mark, first, from whom this wrath will come. It is *divine* wrath, not the anger of a creature whose power is limited and whose duration is finite, but the displeasure of one who fills heaven and earth with his power, and eternity with his existence. It is the wrath of that fearful God, of whom

his servant Job says that “he moveth the mountains of the earth, and overturneth them in his anger that “he shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble that “he commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and he sealeth up the stars.” “Who then can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?”

2. It is also *unmingled* wrath, judgment without mercy, justice without the least mixture of goodness. Here the most sinful have some mitigation of their sufferings, and the most miserable some intervals of rest; but they who suffer in eternity, are always and completely wretched. “They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and they shall be tormented with fire and brimstone; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night.”

3. This wrath is, further, *provoked* wrath. It was not the original inheritance of man. He who made us, loves us; and though we have rebelled against him, he loves us still, for “to him belong mercies and forgivenesses.” We are trying his patience to the utmost every hour we live, but still he spares us, visits us every hour with goodness, and sends us in his gospel the freest and most gracious offers of reconciliation. If then we persevere in rejecting these offers, the wrath which will fall on us, will come not only from a God of dreadful majesty and power, but from a God whose patience has been tired and worn out by our obstinate perseverance in rebellion; from a God provoked, not only by our transgressions against his law, but by our pouring contempt on his mercy; by our rejection of a salvation which cost him the blood of his Son. Hence it is called “the wrath of the Lamb,” the wrath of abused gentleness and exhausted patience.

4. And it is also *accumulated* wrath, a wrath that we have inflamed and increased by every act of sin which we have committed.

All our transgressions provoke the displeasure of God against us, and though we go on year after year without feeling the effects of it, his displeasure still exists, and unless we are pardoned and saved, we shall receive it and bear it all. The longer we live then, and the more daringly we sin against heaven, the more dreadful will be our doom in our latter end. Our daily guilt is increasing our future judgment. Every unclean thought we indulge, every idle word we utter, every transgression we fall into, and every duty we neglect, has its own punishment connected with it, and will aggravate our misery in eternity. “The Lord revengeth,” says the prophet Nahum, “and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies.” “After thy hardness and impenitent heart,” says Saint Paul, “thou treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

5. But what adds so greatly to the fearfulness of this wrath, is the consideration that it is, and ever will be, a *future* wrath. It is “wrath to come,” and when we shall have borne it millions of ages, it will be “wrath to come” still; no nearer an end than it was at first, nor easier to be borne. It is eternal wrath, lasting as the holiness of the Being who inflicts, and the guilt of the sinners who endure it.

The world will not believe this; but there is no truth which the Bible more clearly and more solemnly asserts. It tells us that to the ungodly is reserved “the blackness of darkness for ever;” that their destruction is “everlasting;” that they are tormented by a worm that “dieth not,” and by a fire that “never shall be quenched.” Here for a season we may forget or disbelieve these declarations, but the very moment in which the wrath of God first bursts on us, we shall know it to be eternal; all the sinkings and anguish of despair will accompany it, and dreadfully increase its weight.

6. But who are the people that are liable to this wrath? Alas, brethren, it is the very wrath *which we have all incurred*; the very “condemnation that is come upon all men,” upon all the fallen children of fallen Adam. The first act of sin we ever committed, made it our portion; yea, we brought into the world with us a depraved nature, the seeds of those dispositions and affections with which the curse of God is ever connected. Hence we are said in the scriptures to be “by nature the children of wrath;” and our church speaks the same language. It deems the truth so important, so necessary to be known, that even in our childhood it taught us to regard ourselves as being by nature born in sin, and consequently the heirs of wrath.

II. Is there then no way of escape from the wrath to come? Blessed be God, there is. The text speaks of some who have actually escaped from it, and leads us to consider, secondly, *the deliverance which they have obtained*.

1. Now this is an *undeserved* deliverance. It is true that they who have received it, are a people who have “turned from idols to serve the living and true God;” but what led them to choose his service? No natural love that they had for it, for they were as far gone from original righteousness as any of their race. It was the power of the Holy Ghost, which turned them; the free and distinguishing grace of the very God whom they had long braved and hated. And what has been their conduct since? They have been less unholy than they once were, less desperately wicked than many of their brethren, but not a day, not an hour, has passed, in which they have not provoked the Lord to anger, and again merited the wrath they had escaped. They no more deserve deliverance than that man deserves it, who receives a pardon in the very midst of his crimes, and then sins day by day against the monarch that has spared him.

2. But though it is undeserved, it is a *complete* deliverance. Some degree of displeasure indeed God will ever manifest against iniquity, and even his own children cannot forsake his law, without feeling the effects of his anger. The holiness of his nature, his office as the great Governor of the world, require him to “visit their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.” Hence we see them sharing in all, or at least in most of the calamities of this world of sorrow, and often bearing a double portion of its woes. But as for the wrath to come, it can never touch them. They are as fully, as perfectly delivered from it, as though it had ceased to burn, or they had ceased to deserve it. It is not mitigated merely or withheld; as far as they are concerned, it is destroyed, utterly extinct.

3. Hence their deliverance from it is an *eternal* deliverance; not the consequence of a pardon which some fresh act of transgression may revoke, not the removal to a distance of an evil which some change in their character may again bring near; it is an eternal salvation, a final separation between them and all possibility of condemnation. Their happiness rests on a sure foundation, on a solid basis. The promise of Jehovah ensures its everlasting continuance. Not that he has promised to preserve them in his kingdom, though they rebel against him there; but he has promised that they shall not rebel against him; that age after age shall roll away, and their hearts continue pure as the temple they inhabit, and their peace as undisturbed as his own; yea, that they shall continue for ever increasing in holiness and glory, and growing in a resemblance to himself.

III. But how has this great salvation been obtained? By whom has this eternal deliverance been effected? The apostle answers the question, and points out to us, thirdly, *the author of that deliverance* of which he speaks.

It is certain that man cannot be his own deliverer. Much as he struggles against the natural evils that beset him, and much as he has called forth the powers of his body and mind in order to avert or mitigate them, misery still reigns over the world; sickness still afflicts, and death still desolates it. We cannot banish them. And what power have we over those mental, those spiritual evils which so often rack the human breast? Who can minister to a mind diseased? Who can assuage the torment of a wounded spirit, or blunt the stings of an accusing conscience? Not one. And yet all these present evils are no more to be compared with the wrath to come, than the breath of summer with a whirlwind. The inference then is plain—no man can be the author of his own deliverance. None of the sons of men “can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.”

Neither can the angels who excel in strength, help us. They might have pitied us in our lost estate, but though sinless and happy, they were, like ourselves, the created servants of Jehovah, and had no power to satisfy the

claims of his broken law, or to stay his uplifted arm. But at length a Deliverer came. The eternal Son, the sharer of the Father's own omnipotence, proposed himself as the Mediator between heaven and earth, and arrested the sword of justice. He averted the stroke from his guilty people, and received it on his own guiltless head. "He bare their sins in his own body on the tree." There he magnified and made honourable that law which they had broken; and constrained a wondering universe to adore the awful justice of the Holy One, even while his mercy saves a world of rebels. And now, in consequence of his obedience unto death, "all that believe in him are justified from all things;" their sins are pardoned; all their liability to punishment is done away; they pass from death unto life; the children of wrath become the children of grace, the sons of God, and the heirs of salvation.

To assure them of the certainty of their deliverance, God raised his Son from the grave, whither he had laid himself. "He exalted him to his own right hand" in glory, and there he sits and reigns a Prince and a Saviour, interceding for his beloved people; calling them out one by one and separating them from an ungodly world; sanctifying their hearts; instructing them in heavenly wisdom; comforting them in their tribulations; sharing all their sorrows and joys; and making them meet for their eternal inheritance. By his death he purchased heaven for them, and by his life he prepares them for it, and secures to them its happiness. "God commendeth his love towards us," says the apostle, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him; for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved through his life."

IV. A deliverance from an evil thus great, wrought out by a Being thus exalted and in a manner thus extraordinary, must necessarily make some impression on the minds of those who are the partakers of it. Hence the apostle describes in the text *the effect which the deliverance they have received, produces in the people of God*. "They wait for his Son from heaven."

1. Now this expression implies that *they have a firm belief in his second coming*. While some are doubting and fearing, and others profanely asking, "Where is the promise of his coming?" they entertain no more doubt of the certainty of his second coming, than they do of the reality of his first. They know that their "Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and by means of that faith which contemplates the future as actually present, they lift up their eyes to heaven, and behold him whom their soul loves, clothing himself with his glory, marshalling his angels, bowing the heavens, and travelling down.

2. *They habitually endeavour also to be prepared for his coming; to be ready to meet him in the air; to be ready to stand at his judgment-seat; to be found meet to be partakers of his joy.*

And with such a work as this on their hands, can they “sleep as do others?” Can they plunge into the pleasures and cares of the world, and live as though death were a fable, judgment a jest, and eternity a dream? Impossible. They prepare to meet their God. “Seeing that they look for such things, they are diligent that they may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.” They live as men who know that there is wrath to be escaped, and mercy to be won; that they have guilty souls to be saved, and impure hearts to be cleansed; that death and judgment are before them, and that in another hour eternity may be here.

3. The language of the text implies, further, that *they earnestly desire the coming of their Lord*. They love him, and they consequently long to see him and be with him. Instead of shrinking from the prospect of his advent, they look forward to it as the time when all their trials will be ended, all the sufferings of their fellow-christians brought to an end, all the reproach of their Master done away, and all his enemies destroyed. Hence they are said to be “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God;” not that they can hasten it one hour, but their desire of its approach is so ardent, that they are often anticipating it, and longing to bring it near.

4. But their desire is free from any mixture of impatience, at least, they wish it to be so; for *they patiently wait for the coming of their Lord*.

Weaned from the world, but not discontented under its troubles or weary of its duties, they submit themselves to the will of Christ. Longing “to depart and to be with him,” they yet leave both the time and the manner of their departure to his wisdom. They “rejoice in hope,” and are therefore “patient in tribulation.” They know that their Deliverer will eventually appear unto their complete salvation, and they know too that the salvation which he will bring with him when he comes, will more than recompense them for all their light afflictions; that the longer the wheels of his chariot are delayed in their coming, so much the more glorious will be their own deliverance, and so much the more splendid the triumph of their Lord.

This then is the effect which deliverance from the wrath to come produces in those, who are really delivered from it. It leads them to wait for the risen Jesus from heaven; to believe in, to prepare for, to desire, and to wait for, his second coming. Hence the text before us may be applied, first, to *those among us, who are anxious to know whether they are yet delivered from future wrath*.

You believe perhaps that this wrath will assuredly come, and with fear and trembling you have sought salvation from it; but you know not whether

you have yet attained it, and are still doubtful as to your present state and your final end. Now the words before us plainly discover the means of ascertaining this momentous point. They call upon you to enquire from what source you have expected deliverance; whether you have been striving to work it out by your own prayers, and resolutions, and righteousness, or whether, under a sense of your utter helplessness, you have fled for refuge to the Son of God. What effect has the salvation you have been seeking produced in you? It turned the Thessalonians from the service of idols to the service of God, and caused them to prepare for the coming of Christ, their Judge; what idols and vanities then have you renounced? What sacrifices have you made and are daily making for God? What change has taken place in your principles and conduct? Are you waiting for Christ? Do you really believe that you must stand before him? And are you acting on this belief—preparing to stand before him and to take your trial for eternity? What, if this very day the trumpet should sound and the dead should be raised? What, if the Son of man should this very hour come in his glory? In what state would he find you? with your loins girded, and your lamps burning, and your hearts glowing with joy at his approach? or careless and indifferent about him, living as though you never expected him to come, and surprised and confounded at his appearance?

Put such questions as these to yourselves, brethren, and strive from them to ascertain your condition and prospects. Be determined to discover the truth. To be in a state of doubt whether we are the children of wrath or the children of grace; to be standing on the borders of eternity, and to be unable to tell whether the glories of heaven or the pains of hell may tomorrow be our portion— if we are indeed Christians, this uncertainty cannot patiently be borne. In the midst of all the comforts which the world can afford, never shall we know one moment's peace till we have some ground to regard ourselves as pardoned and saved.

But there are *others who are undoubtedly neither waiting for the coming of Christ, nor seeking deliverance from his wrath*. These things have a place in their creed perhaps, and they imagine that they really believe them; but they do not act as though they considered them realities. The whole course of their conduct is in direct opposition to such a supposition.

Now whence arises this inconsistency? It arises, brethren, from secret unbelief. You have listened to the suggestions of an evil heart and an evil world, till you have learned to hope that the Bible does not speak the truth concerning the purposes of God; and, relying on its falsehood, you are willing to incur some risk, and make light of the threatenings it contains. Nay, there are some of you, who are conscious of your unbelief, and openly avow it. You say that God is too merciful to execute the denunciations of his word; that they are designed merely to alarm us, and not to be acted on; that they

could not be acted on without impeaching the character of the God of love. Then what a riddle is the world we are living in! While you are suspecting the veracity of God, proudly opposing your reasonings to his declarations, and denying the awful justice of his nature, thousands of your fellow-creatures are groaning under his vengeance, are bowed down with misery, writhing with pain, and struggling with the pangs of death. Disorder and suffering are every where, reigning around you, and beneath your feet are the ashes of the dead. Now what do these things prove? Either that there is no “God who judgeth the earth,” or that he is a God of the most fearful holiness. At any rate, they prove that the suggestions of your unbelieving hearts are contrary, not only to the language of the Bible, but to matter of fact. The miseries we behold and endure, cannot be reconciled with the supposition that the threatenings of God will not be executed. On the contrary, they are the forerunners of the wrath to come; the distant thunders which warn you of the rising storm. They tell you that there is a God who sees and marks your transgressions; that “vengeance belongeth to him;” that “the day of vengeance is already in his heart;” that you must “flee from the wrath to come,” or behold its terrors and feel its anguish.

The text may be applied to those also *who are anxiously desiring deliverance from the wrath to come.*

You believe that this wrath is actually coming, and that when it comes, it will be as righteous as it is fearful. Instead of cavilling at the law of God as too strict, and at his justice as too severe, you blame only your own folly which has transgressed the one, and your own desperate wickedness which has incensed the other. While you tremble at the prospect of destruction, you are persuaded that all its woes are only the merited rewards of your iniquities.

Now, brethren, to such as you the words before us are calculated to afford encouragement. They intimate indeed that you have no power to deliver yourselves from vengeance, but they tell you also that the very God whom you have offended, has raised up a deliverer for you, and no less a deliverer than his own eternal Son, the partaker of his greatness and his power, the partaker also of his unsearchable mercy and incomprehensible grace. And now how are you to act? To renounce all expectations of obtaining deliverance from any other quarter, and to seek it in Christ alone; to make a heartfelt application to him for salvation; to commit your immortal soul into his hands, believing in the efficacy of his blood to cleanse it, of his grace to sanctify it, of his power to keep it, of his love to save it. And what will be the result of this application? A free, and full, and glorious salvation; a complete and eternal deliverance from all the consequences of all your sins, and an abundant share of all the joys that are found in heaven.

The subject before us addresses itself, lastly, to *those who have already obtained deliverance from the wrath to come.* It bids them look back to the

greatness of this wrath, and the wonderful means by which they were delivered from it; and while their hearts are burning with joy and gratitude, it bids them look forward to “the glorious appearing of the great God and their Saviour.” Scarcely was he ascended into heaven, when he sent down his angels to assure us that he would come again: and a little afterwards, he himself spoke to us from his throne, and said, “Behold, I come quickly.” “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” “Stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” Your sufferings in the world wherein he has left you, may be great, but he will soon come to put an end to them. Your days may be evil, but they are also few. The road you are travelling may be rugged; the journey however is but short. The conflict may be severe, but fight manfully, for the battle must soon be over. Ere long “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,” and then shall you lift up your heads with joy, and join with a glowing heart and exulting voice in the shout of the triumphant church, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”