

SERMONS,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

HIGH WYCOMBE.

BY

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SERMON XXI.

THE CHRISTIAN REIGNING IN LIFE.

ROMANS v. 17.

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

IN the passage with which these words are connected, the apostle is speaking of the ruin of mankind by the first Adam, and their recovery by Christ, the second. His immediate design is to show the agreement in some respects, and the difference in others, between these two covenant heads. The text is a summary of his whole reasoning; and we shall be enabled to see something of its meaning, if we consider, first, the evil introduced into the world by Adam; secondly, the blessing introduced by Christ; thirdly, the persons for whom this blessing is designed; and, fourthly, the certainty of their receiving it.

I. *The evil introduced into the world by Adam* is death; and not death only, but the reign of death. "By one man's offence death reigned."

There was a time when death was a stranger in the world. It was sin which brought him here, the sin of Adam. In the day in which he transgressed, he died. His body became subject to disease and corruption, and his soul destitute of all spiritual existence. It still lived indeed, but it thought not, it felt not, as it once thought and felt. Its purity was gone, and with its purity, all that constituted its glory.

But the consequences of his transgression did not end here. Sin gave to death a fearful dominion over the whole globe on which man dwelt. In that hour, he claimed the earth as his empire, and all mankind as his prey. Hence he is represented in the text as a mighty monarch, reigning undethroned and uncontrolled over all the sons of men. They indeed love him not and are daily resisting his power, but he laughs to scorn their efforts, and the contest ends in their lying down in the dust. The wide world is his kingdom, his peculiar, yea, in one sense, his only kingdom. Into heaven he never entered, and in hell he cannot destroy; but here he has erected his throne, and given to the earth a name which no other perhaps among the millions of Jehovah's worlds ever bore, "The kingdom of death."

The soul too is brought under his dominion. There is not one of us, who is not by nature "dead in trespasses and sins." Sin is not an incidental evil. It is not a foreign enemy, occasionally assailing us, and though sometimes vic-

torious, at other times beaten off. It is an enemy which has already completely conquered us, and is holding us in vile captivity; subjecting the soul to its laws; filling it with wretchedness by its tyranny, but still making it submit to and even love its bondage. It dwells within every heart, and reigns there: and where sin reigns, there death reigns, death spiritual and eternal.

Now it is vain, brethren, for us to say that these things cannot be, that the offence of one man cannot be followed by consequences so universal, so lasting, and so tremendous. We may doubt and dispute; but while we are disputing, men are sinning, and suffering, and dying around us, and we cannot account either for their depravity or their wretchedness. Facts are confounding our proud reasonings, and exposing them to scorn.

II. It appears then that the reign of death is the evil which was introduced into the world by the sin of Adam. Let us now go on to consider, secondly, *the blessing introduced by Christ*. It is a reign in life.

Life, as it is used by the inspired writers, is a word of very extensive meaning. It is here opposed to death, and expresses a state of spiritual existence, a restoration to the soul of that spiritual perception and activity which it originally possessed, a new birth unto righteousness, a living unto God. The soul no sooner receives this new life, than it begins to be filled with hopes and fears, desires and affections, to which, in its fallen state, it was an entire stranger. It becomes concerned about its own safety, and conscious of its own dignity. The things of eternity arrest its attention, and call all its powers into exercise. It thinks, and feels, and acts, as though it regarded itself born for an immortal existence; as though it looked on heaven as its home, and never could be satisfied or happy, till it should be engaged in its services and sharing in its joys.

But they who have received this precious benefit, not only live, they “reign in life.” And the expression intimates that they have burst the fetters, by which a whole world has been for ages enthralled. And not only this; it implies *power*. It tells us that they have overcome their enemies, as well as escaped from them; not merely freed themselves from their tyranny, but absolutely attained a dominion over them. They were once the subjects of Satan, they now “bruise him underneath their feet.” The world once held them in thralldom; they loved, and feared, and obeyed it; but now its pleasures and follies have lost their power to sway them, and the world also is overcome. Once too they were governed and tormented by lawless passions, tyrannized over by the most degrading lusts; but now, rescued from this abject state, they reign as lords over their own soul, and no longer suffer it to obey the law of sin and death. They “mortify the deeds of the body,” they “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Not that their victory is complete. Their throne is secure, but it is surrounded by rebels who incessantly disturb its

peace. Their conquered enemies still struggle for their former sovereignty. Satan still assails, the world still tempts, sin still rages. They feel “a law in their members warring against the law of their mind;” and this harasses and grieves them. It often causes them to cry out for deliverance, like prisoners in a dungeon, rather than rejoice in their power, like monarchs on a throne.

But with such a dominion as this, though it may be occasionally disturbed, *dignity* must be connected. And what so truly great and noble, as to be masters of ourselves? What so base as to be the slaves of sin? Who has not felt degraded and ashamed as he has obeyed its laws? And who has not felt that there is an honour in self-denial, a greatness in real religion, which the proudest earthly distinctions never can impart?

But we must not stop here. The language of the apostle was designed to lift up our minds to the world above us, to that world where there is life without even the possibility of death, power without any mixture of weakness, and a glory brighter than that of the sun, when he “shineth in his strength.” There the Christian will indeed live and reign. We know not what new faculties may there be bestowed on him, nor to what degree his present powers may be enlarged; nor need we be desirous of knowing. His greatness will not proceed from such sources as these. He will have attained a complete triumph over sin. He will be pure; and purity can invest the meanest of Jehovah’s creatures with a dignity greater than that which the highest without it ever can possess. An angel without purity is a devil, and a man with it is an angel; nay, he is more. Higher and more glorious things have been spoken of him, than we have ever heard spoken of those ministering spirits of God. Even in his present state of humiliation, he is called “the temple of the living God,” his “royal priesthood;” and when he ascends up into the presence of his Saviour, what mind can conceive the greatness of the honour which will be put on him there? Then shall the Son of man say to him from the throne of his glory, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.” And what shall follow this declaration of grace? He who once suffered with Christ, shall be “glorified together with him,” shall enter, in the sight of wondering angels, into his honour and felicity, receive from him a crown of life, and then join in the shout, which throughout eternity shall be the loudest and sweetest in the courts of heaven, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

What a marvellous and glorious change is this, that the offspring of the dust, the feeble mortals who were once the trembling victims of death, should “reign in life;” should enter a world of never ending life and have dominion

over it, have all its joys at their command, and all its honours resting on their heads!

And to whom are they indebted for this wondrous change? To themselves? The dead cannot raise themselves to life. To the father who ruined them? Alas, no! He made them the children of wretchedness, and then he went away and left them to their misery. To legions of angels? All their mighty hosts could not re-animate one lifeless body, much less quicken and glorify a sleeping soul. One Being only was able to accomplish this glorious change, but he was the very Being who seemed the least likely to accomplish it, for it was his righteous vengeance which had sent death into the world, and his voice which had proclaimed him its king. By him however was death dethroned. When the power of this tyrant seemed invincible, we beheld one in our own form triumphing over him, and when we ask the name of the conqueror, when we take up the words of the prophet and say, “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah; this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?” he himself answers the enquiry, and reveals to us his dignity; “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” “The day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help, and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me, and my fury it upheld me.” It is therefore by Jesus Christ, that the former slaves of death now reign in life; by him to the utter exclusion of all others, to the utter rejection of all our claims to any part of the honour of the work. “He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him and he alone must bear the glory.

III. And here an important question arises—*Who are the persons for whom this great blessing, this reign in life, is designed?* All the human race? Clearly not. The sin of Adam has made all his children subject to death, but it would evidently be absurd to say that all men have been made spiritually alive by Christ. The ungodly lives of thousands around us would at once disprove such an assertion. All men indeed, in consequence of the interference of Christ, are under a dispensation of mercy. They are “endured with much long-suffering;” a free and full salvation is offered them, and they are invited and commanded to accept it. But men will not accept it. It is a holy salvation, and they hate holiness. They are in love with their sins, and would rather die in them, than be saved from them.

The text however speaks of some who have received this salvation; and these are the men for whom a kingdom in eternity is prepared. They are described as “receiving abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness.”

They have received “abundance of grace.” And what is “grace?” It is goodness exercised towards those who deserve it not, favour shown to the

unworthy; that free favour which God has manifested towards his sinful children, pitying them in their lost estate, providing a sacrifice for their iniquities, bearing with their provocations, sending them the glad tidings of salvation, discovering to them their need of it, inclining their hearts to seek it, and making them actually partakers of its blessings.

But the apostle speaks of the “abundance of grace,” and the expression which he uses, is strong. It signifies an overflowing, a redundance, of grace; not only a sufficiency of it, but more than a sufficiency; grace enough and to spare. And look at what part we may of the mystery of redemption, we discover at once the propriety of the term. The wisdom which planned and the power which executed this stupendous scheme, and the love which called this power and this wisdom into exercise, are all infinite. The glory of the salvation treasured up for sinners in Christ, the freedom with which it is communicated, the characters of those on whom it is bestowed, all bear witness to the unsearchable riches, the boundless extent, of the divine mercy.

But this “abundance of grace” shines with a peculiar lustre in that part of the work of salvation, which is the operation of the Holy Ghost. Behold a being about to take his departure into an eternal world, and yet as careless concerning it, as though he were never to go there, ignorant, heedless, earthly. He knows not but that he may die tomorrow; he lives as though he should never die. His soul is starving for want of spiritual food, but he feels no spiritual hunger, and labours only for the “meat which perisheth.” Hell is open before him, but he rushes forward, and if he thinks at all about the end of his course, he imagines himself travelling towards heaven. “God is not in all his thoughts he fears him not, loves him not, seeks not his mercy. Devils tremble at his name, but he laughs it to scorn. There is but one thing which he really loves, and that is sin. In this he delights, and though he is told that its wages are death, he cares not, but consents to perish rather than forsake it. Such is man, such is every man, such are we.

But see this being suddenly pausing in his awful career, becoming serious and thoughtful, reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future. Go with him to the house of God, and behold him listening with fear and trembling to the things which concern his peace. Follow him to his habitation; he is communing with his heart. Look at him in his closet; there the stubborn knee bends, there the hard heart melts, there the dry eye weeps, and there the now loosened tongue pleads for mercy. The man now lives. He can think and feel. He is no more like what he once was, than a living man is like a breathless corpse. Speak to him of heaven, of its purity and glories, and he longs to be there. Speak to him of hell, and he trembles. Eternity has now power to affect him. And what a change has taken place in his affections! Mark how he appears to loathe sin! how he watches against it, and struggles with it, and groans under it! And mark too how he loves God; how he rejoices when he

can regard him as his God, and how he mourns under a sense of his displeasure!

Now whence has this change proceeded? What is it that finds man a fit companion for the unclean children of darkness, and makes him meet for the pure “inheritance of the saints in light?” The question admits but of one answer. It is grace, “the abundance of grace,” “the manifold grace of God.”

But the apostle mentions another blessing which they who reign in life receive, and which he describes also as exceedingly abundant—“the gift of righteousness.”

By this expression may possibly be meant that sanctification of the Spirit, that renewal of the heart unto holiness, which the redeemed sinner invariably receives from the free bounty of his Saviour. But the apostle seems rather to refer here to the same righteousness of which he speaks in the following verse, and which he plainly declares to be the obedience or righteousness of Christ. It is this which enables the Lord to pour out the abundance of his grace on his apostate children. He imputes to them the merits of his dear Son, and then he pardons, accepts, and rewards them, without weakening his authority or tarnishing his glory. The apostle calls it a gift, because it is by an act of mercy that it is transferred to us; he speaks of it as an abundant gift, because it completely satisfies the demands of God’s unalterable law, leaves no penalty unpaid, no command unfulfilled, no reward unobtained. Its merit is infinite. It is a robe so pure, that he who wears it, stands before God without spot or blemish; so splendid, that it covers all his shame; so freely offered, that all the naked may array themselves in it, and all rejoice in it as the garment of salvation.

And they who will reign in life, have arrayed themselves in it. “They receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness.” They were once as destitute of these things as any of us, and as careless about them; but they did not, like some of us, continue to despise them. Nor were they content with merely contemplating and admiring them. They sought them by prayer, and by faith they embraced them. They heard of the grace of God, and they opened their heart to welcome it. They heard of the righteousness of Christ, and they put forth their hand to lay hold of it. True, it was the Lord, who opened their heart; true, it was Christ, who gave them strength to stretch forth the withered arm; but this does not alter the fact. The heart was opened, the hand was stretched forth, grace and righteousness were received, and they have made the sinners who possess them, heirs of life, “heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him.”

IV. On this righteousness is grounded the hope of the Christian. It is this which ensures to him the possession of that reign in life, to which he has been taught to aspire. “If by one man’s offence,” says the apostle, “death reigned

by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” Here he seems to assert, that the efficacy of the righteousness of Christ to procure life, is greater than that of the offence of Adam to cause death; that the salvation of the Christian’s soul is even more certain than the death of his body, secured to him by more numerous and solemn declarations, and involving in it the honour of more of the divine perfections. Justice and faithfulness demand his body for corruption, but mercy unites with faithfulness and justice in raising his soul to the kingdom of life.

There may also be another idea included in the apostle’s meaning. His words may imply that the righteousness of Christ is more than sufficient to repair the destructive consequences of Adam’s transgression; that it is more able to remove those evils, than sin was to introduce them. It does not place the believing sinner in the state in which he would have been, had Adam never fallen; it does more; it places him in a more secure and far more exalted state. The glory of the reign in life is greater than the terrors of the reign of death. The dignity and happiness of the one exceed the degradation and wretchedness of the other. In other words, we may gain more by Christ than we lost by Adam. The one made an honourable temple a mournful heap of ruins; the other can not only raise up the temple again out of its ruins, but can make the latter house far more glorious than the former. When man was first created, God looked on him and pronounced him good; but when his beloved Son redeems him, he calls him his inheritance and his portion; he comes and dwells in him, and loves him more than all the creatures of his hand.

Such is the account which the Bible affords us of the fall of man in Adam and his recovery in Christ; and why does it afford us this account? To gratify our curiosity, or to furnish us with a subject for speculation? Alas, brethren, a dying sinner has no time to spare for the indulgence of a vain curiosity; a soul that is perishing, has no leisure to speculate and dispute. This text was written to make us wise unto salvation, to save our souls alive. We are personally and deeply concerned in the truths which have this day been set before us. They relate not to some distant world, nor to some distant people in this. Here death is reigning. We ourselves are his destined prey, and ere long shall fall beneath his arm. Nay, we are fallen already. We are sinners, and sin has brought an awful death on our souls, as well as sown the seeds of corruption in our bodies. That this was once the state of us all, is plain; and it is equally plain that it may be the state of some, of many of us at the present hour. A remedy, it is true, has been provided for us in Christ, but the mere providing of a remedy does not alter our condition. A sovereign medicine may be prepared for a sick man and brought to him, but unless he receives and drinks it, he will die, as certainly as though no medicine had been offered

him. The question to be asked then, is not whether there is an abundance of grace provided for sinners in the gospel, but whether we have received this grace; not whether we need the gift of righteousness—on this point there can be no doubt—but whether by faith we have accepted it. Have we given it that cordial and thankful reception which springs from a sense of our urgent need of it, and a conviction of its inestimable worth? What value do we set upon it? Had we rather lose all we possess, property and health, friends and children, husband or wife, than lose the righteousness and grace of Christ?

Let us make the matter a personal matter. For want of this, multitudes who hear the gospel, and understand it, and almost love it, perish everlastingly. With whatever difficulty or pain the work may be accompanied, it is a work which must be done, or we shall never live unto God. And what will our life profit us, if we do not live unto God? Any existence which is unaccompanied with his favour and uninfluenced by his Spirit, is a curse, a long, protracted, never ending curse; a life which the scriptures often call by that awfully mysterious name, “Death.”

But why should we inherit this curse? It is true that we cannot quicken our own souls; the attempt would be arrogant, as well as fruitless; but the blessing which Christ shed his blood to procure, he is willing to communicate, and he urges it on our acceptance in all its excellence and fulness. In every page of his gospel he declares his ability to bestow it, and proclaims the free and gracious terms on which a world of sinners may obtain it. “I,” he says, “am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” And what was his language on another occasion? “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And what is the language which he is now addressing to us from heaven? “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth, say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

As for you, brethren, whose reign in life is actually begun, what tongue can proclaim your honours and privileges? Your own hearts cannot conceive of them aright, and were an angel to come down to you from heaven, the half of their greatness and glory would still be untold. They are however all comprehended in this one glorious blessing, a union with Christ. You are in him and one with him; members of that body in which the fulness of the Godhead dwells; children of that Parent who is the image of the living God. Your first father ruined and deserted you, but had he even left you the possessions which in his best days he enjoyed, they would have been poor indeed in comparison with the unsearchable riches of which your new parent, the blessed Jesus, has made you the heirs. Adam might have given you all the kingdoms of this lower world and the glory of them, but what has Christ done? He has

given you dominion over a heavenly world, made you partakers of his own greatness, the sharers of his own power. “They that receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life.”

You see then your calling, brethren. Walk worthy of it. Cherish the life that you have received. Watch against every thing that is likely to impair its activity and vigour. Keep near to Christ, the great source of it. Be instant in prayer for that grace which is its food and strength. Act up to the high privileges you possess. Live and reign. Show the world that you can reign. Force men to see that the chains of sin may be burst. Constrain them to confess that there is a reality in the gospel, a power and loftiness in the despised religion of Christ; a dignity which the world never saw in its votaries, and a glory for which the proudest earthly monarch might be glad to exchange his throne.