

SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF GLASBURY,

BRECKNOCKSHIRE,

AND

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,

SURREY.

BY

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A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO., AND T. HATCHARD.

1854.

SERMON XIX.

THE ROCK AT HOREB.

1 CORINTHIANS x. 4.—“They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.”

ROCKS are common in Judæa. Often lofty and sometimes rent into caverns, they serve as places of refuge from storms, shelter from heat, and protection from enemies. Hence the great Saviour of Israel is frequently spoken of in the old testament as their Rock, and all his trembling people are encouraged to fly to him, in all their perils, for safety and repose. But these are not the only, nor yet the chief mercies connected, in the text, with this term. It relates to Israel in the desert; and those poor wanderers needed something more in that dreary waste, than a hiding place and a shade. We find them at Rephidim fainting with thirst; and how are they relieved? Not by rain from above, nor by springs from beneath. The Lord their God “brought them forth water out of a rock of flint.”

Now why was this? Saint Paul informs us. He calls this mysterious fountain a spiritual rock, and the water which flowed from it, spiritual water; and he calls them so, because they were designed to have a spiritual meaning, and to represent spiritual things—the one standing as an emblem of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the other shadowing forth those precious blessings of which he is the Author.

You know, brethren, what these blessings are. Though numerous as our wants, these two words, mercy and grace, will comprehend them all. To us they are of unspeakable importance. They are the very things which we need the most while we are in this world, and the only things which we can take with us when we go into another. Let us then be serious and prayerful, while we endeavour to trace the resemblance which they bear to the waters of Horeb.

And this may be discovered in the source whence these waters sprung, the uses for which they were designed, and the manner in which they flowed. We must however confine our attention, for the present, to their source.

I. The most striking feature in this is *its durability*. It was a rock, a frequent emblem in scripture of solidity and unchangeableness.

And what can shake or change “the high and lofty One,” from whom cometh salvation? No rock so durable as he, no mountain so stable. The rock at Horeb has probably remained the same for three thousand years; the hills around us have stood firm against time and storm for perhaps a longer

period, and their unchangeableness may well be used to set forth the everlasting existence of the great Redeemer; but before they were brought forth, he was in the bosom of his Father; and after they have perished, he will abide unmoved the Rock of ages; he will live and reign the Lord of eternity; “the same “in his faithfulness, love, and power, “yesterday, today, and for ever.”

Here then is something for a sinking heart to rest on. All around me is uncertain; shifting, changing, and passing away. My friends are disappearing; the house I dwell in, and this very church in which my fathers worshipped, are hastening to decay; the rivers and hills, the sun, moon, and stars, will soon be no more. And all within me is as frail. My health and strength are wearing out; my faith often fails me, my hopes droop, and my consolations languish. But he who has the charge of my sinful soul, never changes and can never die. He is the same now, as when he first chose me for himself; the same on his throne in heaven, as on his cross on earth; and when I shall stand before him as my Judge, he will be the same still —“a consuming fire” to them who make light of him, but to the vilest of them that hope in him, unmingled love. O let me therefore “cease from man!” Let me “trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

II. Did the Israelites then, it may be asked, select this rock as a fountain for themselves? No. The source of the stream they drank of, *was chosen by God himself*. Instead of leaving Moses to fix the spot from which it was to issue, he pointed out to him this particular rock, and commanded him, in the use of certain means, to seek for water there. “Behold,” he says, “I will stand before thee upon the rock in Horeb.” Not that any other part of the plain might not have been made to yield a supply as abundant for his distressed people; but he wished to teach them and us, that the means of salvation are not of man’s creating or appointing; that he who is the great Author of our blessings, will communicate them only “as seemeth unto him good.” Thus does he assert his sovereignty, while he manifests his love; and thus does he humble the sinner’s pride, while he saves his soul.

Hence he tells us in his word, that the eternal Jesus, “whom he hath set forth to be a propitiation,” is a Saviour of his own appointment; that he gave him to the world, and sent him into it; that there is a sufficiency for all our wants in him, because “it hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell.”

He declares too the manner in which the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, must be sought; the only terms on which he will bestow it. And no terms can be more gracious. He demands of us no higher a price than the very poorest can pay. And what does he offer us? More than all the treas-

ures of the earth could buy, or the services of all the angels in heaven could earn. Pardon and righteousness, grace and peace, “glory, honour, and immortality,” are held out before us; and this is their price, that we believe the crucified Jesus to be able and willing freely to give them all. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” is the one great command of the gospel. “Thou shalt be saved,” its one grand and comprehensive promise. All that is demanded of sinners, is to be found in the one; all that a God of infinite love can bestow, is contained in the other. He asks of us no more, partly because we have no more to give, and partly because it would tarnish his honour to accept more at our hands. “By grace are ye saved, through faith;” and why through faith? The Holy Spirit tells us—“that it might be by grace;” that in the ages to come, when we are near our great Redeemer in heaven, we might show forth there “the exceeding riches of his grace.”

It follows therefore, that such of you as are thus seeking mercy, relying for it solely on the promises of God in Christ Jesus, can never be disappointed. He who has chosen Christ for a Saviour, will never cast out those who accept him as their Saviour. Resting on him alone, you are building on that corner-stone, “elect and precious,” which the Father himself has laid in Zion; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than your hopes shall fail. You are on the appointed Rock, and though you may sometimes fear and tremble there, you are safe.

It follows too, that such of you as are seeking mercy in any other way, must come short of it. However right that way may seem, it is not the way of God’s appointment, and the end thereof must be “the ways of death.” You may be very honest, very moral, very useful, and, as you and others also may conceive, very godly; but in trusting to such things as these for salvation, what are you doing? Nothing less than this—rejecting God’s method of salvation, and substituting another of your own; pouring contempt on his wisdom, and setting up above it your own vain imaginations; turning away from the door that he has opened to his kingdom, and striving to force your way into his presence by another. Self-dependence in this matter is not a mere error in judgment, a pardonable mistake. It is disobedience, opposition, rebellion. It is an effort to rob the Father of his glory, to exclude the Son from his office and thrust him from his throne, to be independent of the Holy Ghost. It “frustrates the grace of God;” it makes Christ to be “dead in vain.” It has pride for its origin, all ungodliness for its fruit, and destruction for its end.

III. But though the source of these waters in the desert was chosen by God, yet *it was opened, according to the divine appointment, by the hand of man*. It was a smitten rock. The Lord said unto Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod wherewith

thou smotest the river, take in thy hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it.”

The blessed Jesus too was smitten; yea, “stricken of God and afflicted,” smitten by the divine permission and agreeably to the divine purpose. He was smitten in his body; his hands and feet nailed, his head torn with thorns, his side pierced. He was smitten too in his soul, and so smitten there, that were all the anguish that has ever wrung the human heart, poured in one moment into any one heart, there would still be no sorrow like unto his sorrow, the depth of the Redeemer’s misery would still be unfathomed.

And it behoved him thus to suffer. There was a reason and necessity for every pang he bore. Out of the overflowing fountain of love in Jehovah’s breast, not a single drop of mercy could reach the sinner. It ran in streams of life and joy through the hosts of heaven. It would have gladdened the earth, but a broken law stopped it in its course. A race of beings was living here, who had set at nought the “holy, just, and good” commands of him who made them. An awful sentence had therefore gone forth against them, and before it could be repealed, a ransom must be found, a satisfaction for insulted justice; and he whose law had been trampled on, found it in his own everlasting Son. The holy Jesus was set apart from all eternity for the work of our redemption. In the fulness of time he entered on it. Taking on him a body prepared for him, he came into our world, and placing himself in the sinner’s stead, “he gave his back to the smiters,” and “bare in his own body on the tree” the sinner’s curse. And man himself gave the blow. With his own wicked hands, he crucified the Lord of life, and thus fulfilled, though he knew it not, the Father’s purpose. Hence the apostle, when speaking of the cruelty of the Jews against Christ, declares that they were gathered together to do nothing more than what the hand and counsel of heaven had “determined before to be done.” And signs and wonders testified the same. As the symbol of Jehovah’s presence abode upon the rock when Moses struck it, so in the trembling earth, and rending rocks, and fearful darkness, he manifested his presence at the crucifixion of his Son. And the Son himself, though forsaken by his Father, saw him there. The divine decree was hid in his inmost soul. It carried him to the cross, and it kept him on it. He looked on his sufferings as the cup which his Father had put into his hands, and shrunk not from them till “he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.”

Thus the Rock of our salvation was opened, and the waters of life gushed out. Mercy rejoiced to find its way, for the first time, into an apostate world, and has ever since run like a river in the dry places of the earth.

Here we must pause. But we have already seen enough in this history to show us *the sameness of the church in all ages*. It has experienced indeed many changes, changes of dispensations, changes of mercies, and still greater changes of sorrows; but amidst them all, it has had but “one Lord, one faith, one hope.” Its blessings have all flowed from one and the same source, the unchangeable Jesus. Adam in paradise was taught to look to him for redemption, Abraham to rejoice in him, Job to hope in him, and even the impious Balaam to admire him. As for Israel, we are expressly told that “the gospel was preached unto them as well as unto us.” Their sacrifices, their tabernacle, their temple, their worship, their high priest, were shadows of it. And in the wilderness, their very sacraments were of the same kind. “Moreover, brethren,” says the apostle, “I would not that ye should be ignorant how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;” were introduced, as it were by baptism, into the profession of that religion which Moses was to teach them; were consecrated unto God and owned by him as his church:—“and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink”—the manna, like the bread in the Lord’s supper, typifying the body of Christ; and the water, his blood and Spirit. Both too had the same design as our sacraments: they were memorials of past mercies, and pledges of future blessings.

We have however no reason to suppose that all the Israelites saw the Messiah in these faint representations of him. Probably few of them discovered him, and fewer still as a suffering Redeemer. Why then was he thus obscurely revealed? Alas, why is he clearly preached to us? It is the same in Christian England, in the midst of all her boasted privileges, as in the camp of Israel—they are many who hear of Christ, but they are few indeed who really know him. “The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.”

But if the Jews learned nothing from their types, they may teach us, and they were designed to teach us, that there is but one fountain of life for dying man. All the ancient streams of grace came from the crucified Jesus; all we now receive is out of his fulness; and the springs of heaven are in him. Those rivers of pleasure which are flowing there, “proceed out of the throne of God and the Lamb.” It is still the Lamb who feeds and gladdens. “In him” therefore, it is said, “all things, in the fulness of time, will be gathered together in one;” and of him, even now “the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

Hence we may discover here *the great glory of Christ*.

The rock of Horeb had probably no peculiar magnificence in it, yet who could now look on it without admiration? The recollection that it once preserved the lives of two millions of human beings, and was afterwards, for

nearly forty years, a source to them of health and comfort, would invest it with no common grandeur.

And even if the Lord Jesus Christ were not glorious in himself—strip him of the light he dwells in, silence the praises of heaven, remove far away the ten thousand times ten thousand adoring spirits who worship at his footstool, veil him once again in a body of humiliation—yet this one fact, that all the blessedness which sinners ever knew, has sprung from him, lays the believer at his feet in adoration and wonder. We esteem him rich, who, after supplying his own wants, has still wherewith to relieve the wants of others. We call him great, who has preserved a nation; but here are riches that have made unnumbered millions blessed for ever, and a power that has saved a world. It is this, which causes the church below to glory in nothing save the Redeemer's cross. It is this, which the church above takes as the subject of its loudest praise. It was the prospect of this glory, that enabled Christ himself to "endure the cross and despise the shame." It is the enjoyment of this, which now fills and satisfies his soul. And when the Son of man at the last great day shall "sit on the throne of his glory," what is it that will make him so glorious there? The hosts of mighty angels around him? an assembled world at his feet? the melting away before his presence of the earth he suffered on, and of the sun which beheld his reproach? No—the salvation of the lost. "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

Who then does not see here *the duty of praise*? But duty is too poor a word. Praise is a blessed privilege. A sight of Christ in the glory of his grace, turns it into a feeling, an impulse, an honour, a joy. It is the happiest work in which the Christian is ever engaged. It is the work of heaven. It lifts his soul upwards towards heaven. It makes him long to be there. And it shows him too, that he is going there. He feels himself straitened on earth. His powers fail him. He wants his heart enlarged, that it may hold more love for his Saviour. He wishes for a thousand tongues to magnify his name.

And O what will his joy be, when he finds himself able to praise the Redeemer as he wishes to praise him? when he first hears the adorations of the glorified just, and feels that he can join in their song? That must have been a wonderful shout of joy, which was heard in the camp of Israel, when the water first gushed from the rock; but what must that song be, which bursts from the countless thousands of heaven around the throne of the Lamb? We must be content to wait awhile before we take our part in it. Our love however, in the mean time, must not grow cold. It must not end in lively feelings. It cannot satisfy itself with empty words. If it be that love by which faith works, it will make the life holy, as well as the heart warm. It will strive to glorify him among men, whom it hopes to praise among

angels. “The beast of the field shall honour me,” the Lord says, “the dragons and the owls, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.” How much more then the people whom he has formed for himself! “They shall,” he says, “show forth my praise.” Brethren, is this scripture fulfilled in you? Are you living to the praise of redeeming love? Are you beginning on earth the work of heaven?