

SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE PARISH CHURCH OF GLASBURY,
BRECKNOCKSHIRE,

AND

ST. JAMES'S CHAPEL, CLAPHAM,
SURREY.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,
VICAR OF GLASBURY.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

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

1854.

SERMON XIII.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST FOR HIS CHURCH.

ST. JOHN XVII. 24.—“Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

THE twentieth verse of this chapter brings home this blessed prayer to ourselves. The Saviour tells us there that he prays not for his beloved disciples only, but for all who “should believe on him through their word.” Now, brethren, if any of us really believe on him, then this prayer refers to us; we are as much interested in it as Peter who heard it proceed from his lips, or John who leant on his bosom as he breathed it forth. And this is the way to extract sweetness from all the gracious sayings of Christ, to connect ourselves with them, to believe ourselves to have been in his mind as he uttered them; not there undistinguished, mixed up and half lost in a multitude, but as individually in his mind, as though no other creature in heaven or earth were occupying his thoughts.

In thus looking at the prayer before us, we may consider, first, the description which Christ gives us in it of his people; secondly, the blessings he supplicates for them; and, thirdly, the light which it throws on his own character and their condition.

I. The Lord Jesus *describes his people* in this text, not as they are generally described in scripture, by their character, but by a transaction in which they had no immediate concern; by a transfer of them, which has taken place between the eternal Father and his everlasting Son. They are those, he says, whom the Father has given him.

But what is the meaning of this language? Are not the heavens and the earth Christ's? and have they not been his, with all that lives and moves and has a being in them, since the moment when they started into existence? Yes; but we must observe that our Lord is not speaking in this passage as “God over all,” for as God to whom could he pray? He speaks rather in his human character, as the Son of Man, as the incarnate Mediator and Head of his ransomed church. In this character, the Father promised to him a people, and has made them over to him—the very people whom he had himself selected from among his creatures, to be the happiest monuments of his goodness and the richest sharers of his glory.

The act of his bestowing them on Christ proves their value in his own sight. He would not have offered to one so dear to him, a gift which he himself despised. An earthly father gives his child his best; and there was nothing in all his wide dominions, which their great Monarch valued more,

when he gave us to his Son, than he valued us. Not that he cut his people off, by this transfer, from himself; not that he abandoned the purpose he had formed to redeem them; no, he gave them to the anointed Jesus that this design of his love might be accomplished, that all his purposes of grace concerning them might be more effectually and more gloriously fulfilled.

1. Hence we may view them as given to Christ, in the first instance, as *his charge*.

When the Father first set his love upon them, he foresaw that they would be utterly unworthy of his love, and altogether incapable of entering into his blessedness; in the same state of condemnation as their fellow-sinners, and just as much alienated from him, as earthly-minded and sinful. He therefore describes himself in the prophet Jeremiah as saying to them, “How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?” “How shall I take this condemned, this rebellious, this polluted people into my own unsullied heavens?” It is plain that before his purposes can be accomplished, his people must be pardoned and justified; the honour of that holy law they have insulted must be in some way vindicated, and his own character as the great Lawgiver upheld: and they must undergo too a total change within their own souls, have all their desires and thoughts and hopes purified, be made in fact new men. And this arduous work God confided to his Son. He committed them into his hands as their all-sufficient Redeemer, to be first ransomed by his blood and clothed in his righteousness, and then to be wrought on by his grace, lifted up in their affections from their native dust, and taught to thirst after heavenly employments and delights.

On this account the Lord Jehovah often speaks of the incarnate Jesus as his servant; and Christ testifies of himself as coming into the world with a commission from his Father, and as actually fulfilling here his destined work. “I came down from heaven,” he says, “not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

2. But a gift, to be acceptable, must bear to be tried by yet another test—the receiver must value it as well as the giver. If then Christ has consented to receive us, no matter how worthless we may really be, we are precious in his sight. Just as we infer the love of the Father towards us from the gift he made of us, so we infer the love of Christ towards us from his joyful readiness to accept us. We are warranted therefore to advance a step farther, and say that the people of Christ are given to him as *his reward*.

But how can he be rewarded, “in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead?” He is an infinite Being; and how can his greatness be augmented or his happiness enlarged? We cannot answer a question like this. We

can only again say that we have the Saviour before us in his human form, with human feelings and a human heart; and that heart is as capable of receiving accessions of pleasure as our own, and that nature is as susceptible as ours of honour and reward. And it is in this human character that he receives his people. The Father gives them to him in his assumed office of a servant, and as a recompense for his labours in that office. He makes them over to him as a people peculiar to himself, appointed to bear his image, to show forth his praise, to be the everlasting trophies of his conquests. This was his stipulated reward, and with this he is well pleased. No sooner did he hear the promise, "He shall see his seed," than he answered, "Lo, I come. I delight to do thy will, O my God." And what was this will? Nothing less than going through the lowest degradation and misery to a cross, and from that cross to a grave. And in this, he says, he delighted; not that his soul took pleasure in misery—he delighted in it, that by it he might purchase his church unto himself, that he might have the companions of his tribulation for the companions of his glory, that he might have such worthless beings as you and me, by his side in the heavens, redeemed, and purified, and blessed. And O with what joy and triumph will he appear, when the number of his elect is accomplished and his reward is full! when the last soul that is his, shall be gathered into his kingdom; when the last stone shall be raised in his spiritual temple; when the last spot and wrinkle on his church shall be wiped away; when not a grace shall be wanting, or a stain be left; when he shall stand before the throne of Jehovah, and say, like a faithful servant, or rather like a triumphant victor, "It is finished." "Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me." "Those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost."

And now, brethren, with what seriousness should each one of us ask himself, Am I one of this blessed people? Has my soul been thus given to the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I at this present moment his charge, and shall I be a part of his great reward?

And we need not ascend into heaven, and turn over there the records of eternity, to answer these questions; they may be answered easily and safely within these walls. If I would know whether the everlasting Father has given me to his Son, I must ask whether I have ever given myself to that Son. Have I ever felt my need of his care and keeping? Influenced by this feeling, have I committed my soul into his hands as guilty, and polluted, and helpless, to be washed from its sins in his blood, purified by his Spirit, and made meet for his presence by his grace? Have I done this repeatedly? Am I doing it still? with simplicity of soul, with fervent prayer, with deep humiliation, with lively thankfulness, with faith unfeigned? And how do I feel and act towards Christ? Do I in the main regard myself as his, his only, entirely his? Have I given my heart to him? Is he its Lord, the supreme object

of its desires, the monarch of its affections, the one thing that it seeks, and clings to, and hopes in, and loves? Then, brethren, are we at this moment the charge of Christ, in his care and keeping; then are we set aside to be his recompense and joy. If we love Christ, it is because God has first loved us. If we have chosen him for a Saviour, we may be assured that he has chosen us to salvation. If we are willing to be his, at his command and disposal, we know the reason—he has made us “willing in the day of his power.” A process is going on within us, which stamps us as his, and which, when it is finished, will place us in heaven among the jewels of his crown. It follows then that the prayer we have before us, is nothing less than a prayer for ourselves.

II. Let us consider *the blessings it supplicates*. These appear to be two.

1. The first is *the presence of Christ, and that in heaven*.

In a limited sense, the Lord Jesus is with us on earth, but then he is often with us, as he was with his two mournful disciples in their way to Emmaus, undiscovered; he walks by our side, but through the weakness of our mortal nature, we see him not, and even to his face we mourn his supposed absence. And when the veil is for a moment removed, when we feel that our beloved Master is actually near us, how soon does he disappear! how quickly are the wonderful manifestations of his presence gone! He breaks the bread of joy, blesses it, and gives it us, and then vanishes out of our sight. At the best too it is only by faith that we see him. He is invisible even when most enjoyed.

Now this state of things is for the present good for us, but it is not fully satisfactory either to us or to Christ. We long to be with him as we are one with another; as Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, were wont to be with him; as the redeemed in heaven are with him: and he himself is not contented with knowing the blessedness of his heavenly glory alone, or with a portion only of his church; he deems his blessedness even on his throne not fully perfect, till he shares it with every soul that is his. And this participation of feeling and desire between the exalted Saviour and ourselves, should cause this very feeling and desire to be pleasurable to us. It should encourage the hope that as we are one with him now in heart, so shall we be eventually in state and happiness.

And mark where the presence of Christ is to be enjoyed. He prays that we may be with him “where he is.” Now, in the spirit, he is everywhere. He is God, and, as God, he fills all space with his existence. He must speak therefore here of that world wherein he manifests his presence, where he dwells in the body, where he even now lives and reigns as the glorified Son of Man. And this is to be, not only with the most glorious Being in the universe, but with him in the most glorious place; in the place which he calls

his own kingdom, his own city, his own house; a world which he has built to show forth his power, to declare his greatness by its magnificence as gloriously as any material things can declare it; so gloriously, that, when we see it, we shall deem it almost worthy to be his dwelling. To be with him there, is to be with him in a world from which all sorrow and sin are excluded; where not a single unholy feeling is ever experienced, nor a single tear shed, nor sigh breathed; where the weary soul may rest, and the troubled soul be quiet, and the tempted soul repose, and the fettered soul be free. It is to be with him not alone, but with the highest and best society the universe can afford; with cherubim and seraphim, with the patriarchs and fathers, with apostles, and prophets, and martyrs. It is to meet again in his blissful presence the companions of our youth; the parents, and children, and friends, whom death has separated from us, or distance severed, or infirmity estranged; and to meet them where death can touch them no more, where distance can never intervene, nor passion disturb. In a word, it is to be where the Lord Christ himself delights to be; where he finds the materials of joy for his own wonderful soul. It is to see his face in its brightness, to hear his voice in his happiness, to sit down at his glorified feet. It is for the abased members of the body to be united to the triumphant Head; it is to meet the Bridegroom in all the radiance and joy of the bridal morning; it is to be with the incarnate Jehovah in Jehovah's own everlasting heavens.

2. Hence our Lord connects *the sight of his glory* with the enjoyment of his presence. He seems to pray for the one because it leads to the other. "I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

And what are we to understand by the glory of Christ? There is no difficulty in telling what interpretation our own minds, if we did not check them, would give to this language. We should labour to place our blessed Master before us in a form of more than angelic radiance, surrounded with a brightness such as no human eye has ever gazed on, and worshipped by the countless hosts of countless worlds. We should strain our imaginations to paint a scene of unearthly splendour. But after all, what should we have done? Little more than betrayed the weakness of our own souls. Instead of showing how high an incarnate God may rise, we should only show how low in its conceptions an immortal spirit may sink. The chief glory of the exalted Saviour consists not in such things as these. It is independent of situation or circumstances. It flows not from the throne he sits on, nor the world he dwells in, nor from anything of an outward nature. A cross could not impair, the sceptre of heaven can scarcely augment it. It is the glory of his perfections; the honour that results to him from the manifestations he has made of his holiness, and power, and grace. Some of these manifestations are revealed to us now, they are visible on earth; but the view we get

of them here is partial and obscure, when compared with their effulgence in heaven. We know not indeed all the modes in which he is there unfolding his excellencies. They may exceed our conceptions in their variety, as much as they will assuredly surpass them in their nature and extent. But scripture seems to warrant the conclusion that the chief glory of Christ even in heaven, emanates from the work he has performed in this fallen world. There can be no doubt but that this was the glory he had more immediately in his mind at this time. He speaks not of "the new heavens and the new earth," of that splendid universe which will succeed the present marred creation, and make the morning stars once more sing together with admiring joy; he alludes not perhaps to his own form of heavenly beauty; he refers mainly to his glory as the once abased but now triumphant Mediator; that exhibition of his perfections, which is displayed in his redeemed church; in the mode of its redemption, in the greatness of that happy multitude which compose it, in their exaltation, their purity, and bliss. St. Paul tells the Thessalonians of the glory of the Lord Jesus in the day of his appearing; he connects it with his presence; and then he immediately adds, "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." The glory which their salvation will throw around him, will constitute, in the scene of his proudest triumph, his highest honour; it will be so amazingly great, that the Holy Spirit describes him as coming down from the heavens to claim it. It is too a glory of which the redeemed can form the best estimate, and in which undoubtedly they must take the deepest interest. It is mixed up with themselves. They are the honoured instruments of its manifestation and display.

This glory Christ prays that we may be with him to behold; but do we not see it now? Yes, brethren; if we are really on our way to heaven, God "has already shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." There are moments when it almost overpowers our minds with its brightness. But what, even in these favoured moments, do we discern of it? About as much as a man just emerging from blindness beholds of the ocean, when he takes of it his first wondering glance. We must be with Christ where he is, before we can form one adequate conception of its greatness. We must escape from a world of littleness and shadows, this scene of delusive pomp and empty glitter. Our souls must be set free from their prisons of dust. They must be rectified in their judgment of things, and enlarged and refined in their powers, by the air of a nobler world. We must wake up to a sense of spiritual beauty; not that faint and transient sense of it, which now distinguishes the heaven-born Christian, and, weak as it is, elevates him high above his fellow-men; but to such a perception of its excellence, as annihilates the splendour of all outward greatness, and leaves us nothing to admire in any creature, except the traces

we can discover in him of his Creator's likeness. And then at last we shall see our glorified Master in some measure as he is, and the consequence will be, we shall be changed into his image. The sight we shall get of his greatness, will make us great. It will assimilate us to the Being we admire. Here already a resemblance is begun between him and us; it began from the moment when we first lifted up to him the eye of faith; this vision of his heavenly glory will complete it; not indeed bring it at once, no, nor ever, to its perfection, but make it at once so close, so transcendent, that the astonished soul will deem itself almost absorbed in the radiance of its Lord. "We know," says John, "that when he shall appear, we shall be like him;" and why shall we be like him? He tells us—"we shall see him as he is."

These then are the blessings which Christ here supplicates for us. What more could he have asked? O that our prayers for ourselves always rose as high! They could not rise higher. The noblest archangel among the hosts of heaven could not wish for more. "Happy are thy men," said the queen of Sheba to Solomon, "happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee;" but what is the presence of Solomon to the presence of Christ? "It is good for us to be here," exclaimed Peter on the mount of transfiguration; but what was that wondrous mountain with its shining cloud, and its celestial visitants, and their glittering raiment? The eye of man bore the sight of it; but "I fell at his feet as dead," said John, when he saw the Saviour's glory in heaven. And what would Peter say now of the happiness of that once splendid hour? It was a foretaste of heaven; but no more like heaven, than Peter, the fisherman, on the lake of Galilee, was like Peter, the blessed, near the throne of God. It was the happiness of a babe compared with the tide of joy, that sometimes for a moment runs through the breast of a satisfied and happy man. It was less. It was the first gleam of the morning, that announces the rising sun, but gives us not one faint idea of its mid-day effulgence.

III. It remains now that we enquire *what light this prayer throws first on Christ's own character, and then on our condition.*

1. We may certainly trace in it *human feeling*, two at least of the ordinary workings of the human heart.

We are all conscious that if we tenderly love a friend, his mere presence is pleasurable to us. We wish to be where he is, even though we should have no intercourse with him. There is a gratification in simply being by his side. David felt this, and felt it towards his God. He expresses it strongly. "In thy presence," he says, "is fulness of joy."

We are all conscious too of another tendency of our nature. Let any great or signal good be conferred on us, let our hearts glow with any fresh accession of joy, our first impulse is to make those whom we love ac-

quainted with our happiness. We scarcely begin to enjoy it fully till they also rejoice in it. Nay, brethren, which of us, at some time or another, has not found his mercies and joys saddened, because those who would have shared in the gladness they impart, can know nothing of them, are lying unconscious in the grave? Our children, when unchecked, are daily manifesting this feeling in their little pleasures; and if we turn to the last interview of Joseph with his brethren, we shall find there a touching instance of its strength. It was a moment of great excitement. He had just given way to the struggling emotions of his soul, and discovered himself to his astonished brothers; and now this natural feeling forces itself out most conspicuously. His father must know, and know at once, of his elevation and greatness. "Haste ye," he says, "and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt." And that one earnest charge does not content him. "Ye shall tell my father," he says again, "of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen."

And now look at the man Christ Jesus. He is about to be separated from the friends he loves, to be removed as far away from them as death can sever him. And how does he act? They are to be left in an ensnaring world; he prays for them therefore, in the first place, that they may be kept from its evils; and then he prays, as though he were praying for himself rather than for them, that they may be with him again, that "where he is, there they may be also."

It is impossible to read this prayer and the address which precedes it, without discovering the tender and almost intense pleasure which the Saviour derived from the company of his disciples, the sorrow which he felt at the prospect of losing it, and the quiet but yet deep pleasure with which he looked forward to enjoying it again. As for "the joy that was set before him," the idea that they would ultimately behold it, that they would find their chief happiness in the contemplation of it, appears to give it in his mind new power and value.

And is it not cheering, brethren, and useful also, to trace in our beloved Lord such feelings as these? They seem to bring him so very near us, to render him so easily approachable, to set him before us as so exceedingly attractive; they so encourage and sweeten our communion with him, that we can scarcely think of them too often, or dwell on them too much. If any one will turn this cup of mercy into a poison, will push this matter farther, and place sinful feelings, the corrupt tendencies of our fallen nature, in the heart of that Being whom all heaven adores for his holiness, I would say to myself, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret!" I would say to you, Not for worlds believe them. Carry your view of the humanity of your incarnate God to the utmost bound that perfect purity will go; you cannot then carry it too far; scripture will go with you all the way; but to pass that

bound, to conceive of the great Lord of the heavens as having been tainted at any time with our base appetites, and corroded with our vile affections; to look on him from whom must proceed every holy desire and right feeling which can enter our minds, as having admitted into his own mind anything that defiles—the thought is appalling; we could not harbour, we could not tolerate it for a moment, if we had once caught the faintest glimpse of the exalted Saviour as he is, or had one just conception of his glory.

2. We may discover also in this prayer *the strength and tenderness of our Lord's love*.

Our manifestations of affection towards the objects of our regard, come from us when our minds are not much taken up with our own concerns, in intervals of leisure and repose. Acute sorrows, or any deep emotions of pleasure, leave us but little inclination to enter into the joys or griefs of others. We become almost inevitably more or less selfish, and want to receive sympathy rather than impart it. But not so Christ. He was now drawing near the hour of his crucifixion. Standing on the very verge of that fathomless sea of woe, through which he was about to pass, we might have supposed that every thought of his mind would have been given to it, that he would not have had a feeling within him for any other than himself. But what is the fact? If he has not forgotten his own approaching miseries in the sorrows of others, he acts as though he had forgotten them; his last employment before his agony begins, is a long and painstaking effort to comfort a few troubled hearts. His disciples are cast down at the prospect of losing him; he talks no more, he seems to think no more, of Gethsemane, and Golgotha, and Calvary; every power of his mind is called into exercise to chase away their grief. That was the triumph of love over fear and anguish; look now at another triumph it achieved over hope and joy.

These emotions were at this time in active exercise in the Saviour's breast. We are told that "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame;" he had such a foresight of the glory which awaited him, so ardent a desire and so vivid an expectation of entering into it, that he rose superior to the scenes of darkness which separated it from him. Hope triumphed over fear. It did not annihilate it, but it wrought more powerfully. But it could not force love to give way. With all its mighty influence and all its unutterable blessedness, it left the Saviour as much alive to every feeling in his disciples' hearts, as though he had not a single emotion in his own.

And look at him yet again. His work of suffering is now past. He is on the mount of Olivet, about to go to his long looked for glory. The cloud that is to receive him, is hovering over him; the everlasting gates are opened; all the hosts of heaven are waiting with eager expectation for their returning King; there is but a moment, but a step, between him and the utmost joy

that even his soul can know. And where are his thoughts? In heaven, amidst its splendours and joys? No; they are among his disciples still. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them." He goes into heaven, looking down on those whom he loved on earth; almost leading us to believe that he has left them with reluctance, that he had rather stay and share their labours and sorrows, than go up to his heavenly joy alone.

There is no overcoming of Christ's love for his people. It is an unconquerable love. Sorrow could not make him neglect, nor can joy cause him to forget them. No situation can impair his love, no circumstances alter it. It has the mastery of his infinite mind.

3. We see lastly, in this text, *the certainty of the Christian's salvation*.

It is certain, for it has not only been purchased for him by the most precious blood that was ever shed, ensured to him by the most solemn promises, and taken possession of in his behalf; it is an object of the desire, of the earnest supplication and prayer, of no less exalted a petitioner than the Son of God. And not only this, his own glory and happiness are concerned in our attainment of it. We are his charge, and he must not suffer us to perish; we are his reward, and he will not lose us. From our salvation flows much of his own honour; he has condescended to make us necessary to his own eternal joy. The scripture speaks as though his bliss were not complete without us. "He shall see," it says, "of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He rejoices now, but he rests not in his joy, he is not satisfied till we share it. True, we are vile as the dust we tread on, worthy only to be dashed to pieces by his arm, or preserved in existence as monuments of his displeasure; but he mixes us up with his glory, involves his own felicity as man with our salvation; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than this connection be severed, than our souls be lost. If we have given ourselves to him, as surely as we now breathe the air of earth, we shall see his face in his own happy heaven. We may for a time, like these disciples, be in heaviness and sorrow, have yet many a weary year to pass in a harassing and exhausting world; we may, like them, lose sight of our Lord; our expectations from him may waver, and our hope may perish; we may sometimes be well nigh tempted to forsake, and at other times be hardly able to cleave to him; but all this while, this petition concerning us stands registered in heaven; all this while, it is the desire of Christ, the longing of his soul, that we may be "where he is, and behold his glory."

With such a prospect before us, so glorious and so certain, shall we say one to another, Let us lift up our heads with joy amidst the troubles of an evil world? This prospect seems to annihilate our troubles; we wonder that they should ever draw from us one tear or sigh. We are to sojourn in Mesech but a little longer; we are soon to take our leave for ever of the tents of Kedar; we are already within the distant rays of that glory which is

our sure inheritance; and can the light afflictions of this present time have more power to depress, than that “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” has to elevate and gladden us? O no! Our concern shall be to feel and act like men who are going to a happy and holy Saviour in a holy and happy world. We will labour to have “our conversation in heaven;” to catch something of its spirit before we enter into its joy.

And one word to you, brethren, who fear that these things concern you not. Have they enkindled your desires? Have they excited in you one wish that Christ were yours and you were Christ's? O carry out that wish into supplication, turn those desires into prayers. You behold here a praying Saviour; and what is the object of his petition? The salvation of his ransomed people. Have you no reason then to pray for your own salvation? And does not this prayer show you what Christ really is? in what he delights, and in what his joy, and his blessedness, and his glory, lie? They lie in this one thing, in saving souls; in carrying just such souls as yours, lost and sinful and wretched, to a pure and blissful world. Commit yourselves then to his care. Look upwards and supplicate that faith in him, which will place you in his hands. It is no unattainable, mysterious thing. It is nothing more than a simple belief in the testimony of God concerning him, a giving credit to his promises, a confidence in his power, his goodness and love. Approach him with this, and, in that moment, he will number you among those that are his; he will cleanse you from all your sins in the fountain of his precious blood; he will cover you with a “robe of righteousness;” he will keep you by his omnipotence; and as surely as you close your eyes in death, so surely, when you open them again, you shall see the face of your Redeemer, see him as your Redeemer, and be welcomed by him as his own.