

SERMONS,  
PREACHED  
IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF  
HIGH WYCOMBE.

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## SERMON IX.

### THE THRONE OF GRACE.

HEBREWS iv. 16.

*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

IN the two preceding verses of this chapter, the apostle sends our thoughts upwards to heaven. He shows us Jesus as having passed thither in the character of our High Priest, as pleading for us before his Father's throne, and as being still "touched," in the midst of the splendours around him, "with the feeling of our infirmities," and bearing a part of all our sorrows and trials. From this cheering representation of the Saviour, the exhortation in the text is drawn. "Let us therefore," he says, "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Let us enquire, first, what those blessings are which are spoken of in these words; secondly, where they are to be obtained; and, thirdly, how they are to be sought. And O may he that sits on this throne of grace, send down his Holy Spirit from on high to rest upon us, and to take up his abode in our hearts!

I. We are to consider, first, *the blessings spoken of in the text.*

1. The first of these is *mercy*, pardoning mercy, reconciling mercy, saving mercy. This mercy is ever needful. The brightest saint needs it, as well as the greatest sinner. We need it every hour of our life, and in every action of our life. Whatever difference there may be amongst us in other respects, here we are all on an equality. We must all obtain mercy, great mercy, free mercy, or we must perish.

The apostle mentions this blessing first, because till it is made ours, we have no ground to hope for any other spiritual gift. Pardon is introductory to all the other blessings of the gospel. We must go to God as a Saviour, before we can go to him as a Comforter and a Friend. We must apply to him to pardon our sins, before we can apply to him to cheer and strengthen our souls.

2. The second blessing spoken of in the text is *grace*, supporting, helping grace, "grace to help in time of need."

All our times are times of need. There is not a moment of our life, in which we are not poor and altogether needy. But there are certain seasons, in which we especially need grace to help us. A time of affliction is one of these seasons, when our souls are ready to faint within us, and our hope to perish. A time of temptation is another, when sin seems to be forcing its way into the mind, and

the corruptions of our depraved hearts stand ready to welcome it. There are seasons of perplexity and anxiety, which are times of need; seasons of coldness, deadness, and spiritual desertion; seasons of despondency on account of sin, when the bewildered soul looks around for comfort and finds none, and is ready to fly even to despair as a refuge from its fears. A time of death too is a time of need, when our bodies are about to be broken to pieces and our souls to enter eternity, to go into that untried and unknown world of spirits, where all is either unmixed anguish or perfect bliss.

In these times of need, nothing can help us, but grace. It is grace only, that can subdue our corruptions, resist temptations, warm our hearts, and bring strength, comfort, and hope, to our troubled souls.

The language of the apostle seems to imply that the grace, which we are principally to seek, is grace for present, and not for future need. We are to come to the throne for grace “in time of need.” There is a strange propensity in some minds, to be continually anticipating these times of need, to be incessantly looking forward to future trials and difficulties, and thus to bring distress into the mind by a premature anxiety about the morrow. We often find ourselves enquiring, “O what should I do, if this or that affliction should befall me? How would my poor soul bear to have this or that friend taken from me? to be reduced to poverty? to have to struggle with pain, and sickness, and death?”

Now this anxiety about future trials is often sinful. It occupies too much of our thoughts; it has its origin in distrust of God; it silences the voice of thankfulness, and leads to gloominess and discontent. “Take no thought for the morrow,” says Christ, “for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” Grace to help shall come when it is needed; but why should it come before? We shall have grace to suffer in a suffering season, and grace to die in a dying season. As our days are, so shall our strength be. The Bible gives us this assurance, and the experience of some among us has fully confirmed it. We have looked forward in the days that are past to trials, and shuddered at the prospect. These dreaded trials however have come, and come perhaps with aggravations which we never thought of. We have been reduced to the poverty we shrunk from; the disease and pain which we dreaded, have seized our frames; our friends have been taken from us, the very friends, it may be, that we thought we could least spare; and what has been the consequence? Has our soul sunk as we expected it to sink? No. It has risen stronger and stronger, and soared higher and higher, and at length bounded, as it were, over the trial, and left us a wonder to ourselves.

What then does this teach us? Humiliation for the time that is past, and trust for the time to come. It tells us, when we find our souls beginning to be anxious about grace for future emergencies, to stop them short by asking whether we have all the grace that is necessary for our present need; whether, at the present moment, we do not want grace to root out unbelief from our minds, and to teach

us submission to the will of God.

II. Let us now go on to enquire, secondly, *where this mercy and this helping grace are to be obtained*. The apostle sends us for them to “the throne of grace.”

1. He tells us to seek them at *a throne*: he sends us therefore to a God of *majesty*. Thrones on earth are designed for those who are of the greatest glory among men, and he who sits on the throne of heaven, is the most glorious Being in the universe; “the Father of an infinite majesty.”

A throne indicates too that the God who sits on it, is a God of *dominion* and *sovereignty*; that he reigns over the universe, and is its lawful and supreme Governor; that all the creatures in this lower world, the sun and the stars in the firmament, and all the angels in heaven, are under him as his subjects. “The Lord,” says the psalmist, “hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.”

A throne implies also that he is a God of power of infinite, almighty power, in the universe over which he reigns. As the kingdom and the glory are his, so is the power also. There is nothing which he cannot perform. He could in a moment dash to pieces the millions of worlds which his hand has formed, and in a moment create a million more. All the spiritual part of his creation is as much under his control, as the material. He can bend at his will the minds of men and of angels, and make them subservient to his purposes of grace.

“But this majesty, this sovereignty, this power,” it may be said, “are nothing to me. They bring no comfort to my heart. They rather repel than invite. They excite terror rather than hope. They tell me that God is glorious, while I feel that I am vile as the dust I tread on; that he has a claim on my allegiance and service, while I know that I have been a rebel against him, and been serving another lord; that he has power to take vengeance on the sinner, while I am conscious that I have hourly broken his laws.”

2. The apostle meets this objection, and goes on to call this great and glorious throne *a throne of grace*.

It has been supposed that there is an allusion in this expression to the mercy-seat in the temple. This mercy-seat was the golden cover of the ark. At each end of it was a cherub, and between these cherubim the Lord was said to sit or reside, as on a throne. This view of the text would recall to the mind of the experienced Christian many interesting subjects of contemplation, but it will perhaps be more generally profitable to consider the language of the apostle in a more obvious point of view.

When the apostle sends us to a throne of grace, he reminds us that *he who sits upon this throne, has mercy and grace at his disposal*; that he has removed out of the way all impediments to the exercise of his goodness; that he can now be gracious to a world of rebellious sinners in a way consistent with his honour, and show himself a God of mercy without tarnishing the glory of his other

perfections. The awful display of his infinite holiness and fearful justice, which Jehovah gave to the universe on the cross of Christ, can leave none of his creatures at liberty to suspect that he has ceased to be the hater of iniquity, when he redeems from destruction and carries to heaven the sinful children of men. They are the trophies of his holiness and justice, as well as the monuments of his mercy and grace. The splendour which their salvation throws around his throne, was unknown to the creation before they were redeemed, and will for ever eclipse the glory of all his other works. Hence, though we have sinned against him, God can now pour upon us the richest blessings of his goodness, and at the same time bring glory to himself by the exercise of his mercy. He can give us, in the most free and honourable manner, pardon for our sin, strength for our weakness, and comfort for our sorrow.

The expression used by the apostle tells us also that God not only has mercy and grace at his disposal, but that *he is willing to bestow them on the sinners who seek them*. The place on which he sits, declares his willingness. If he presented himself to us on a seat of judgment, a tribunal of justice, we might conclude that he was ready to discharge the offices of a judge, that he was sitting there to execute judgment. When therefore he leaves this tribunal, and presents himself to us on a throne of grace, we may surely conclude that he is ready to show grace and mercy; that he is willing to receive the petitions of the sinful, and to dispense help to the needy.

This expression shows us also the manner in which the Lord exercises his mercy and grace. It tells us that *he dispenses these blessings freely and royally*.

He dispenses them *freely*. If God is a sovereign on a throne, it cannot be consistent with his honour to receive ought for his benefits. Even an earthly monarch considers it a degradation to take a price of his subjects for his favours. Will the great Sovereign of heaven then demand a price for his mercy of such poor, mean subjects as we are? Never. All his acts of mercy are acts of grace, of pure, unmerited grace. They must be so, or we could never receive them. Whatever is required, we have nothing to give; for sin and misery are all we can call our own.

God is ready to bestow his grace *royally*, magnificently, as well as freely. When he describes himself as a king seated on a throne of grace, he assures us that he will give like a king; that he will bestow upon us not a few trifling gifts, but such as are answerable to his greatness and magnificence. We dishonour him therefore, if we do not expect great things at his hands. We must not regard the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as a common benefactor. He is ready to give us not merely mercy to deliver, but grace to exalt us; “exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.”

But here it may be said, “What if God has mercy and grace at his disposal, and is ready to give them thus freely and royally; is he not a Being too great and too high to be approached by me? I need these blessings, and God maybe ready

to bestow them according to his sovereign will; but where is the sinner who will dare to go to so high a God, and ask for them?" The expression which the apostle uses, meets this objection also. It tells us that *the Lord is willing to be asked for his mercy and grace*, and that too by the meanest sinner.

When he offers himself to us on a throne of grace, he gives us the strongest assurance which he can give us, that he will admit dust and ashes into his presence; that he will hear and answer prayer; that it is the very season, the very opportunity, to carry our requests to him, and to have them granted. He "sits" upon this throne, he abides and dwells there, for this very purpose, that he may be always ready to receive our petitions. He "waits" here to be gracious.

III. In what frame of mind then does it become us to approach him? *How are we to seek of him mercy and grace?* This is our third enquiry, and this the apostle answers. "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace."

The sense in which he here uses the word "boldly," may be inferred from the expression with which it is connected, "the throne of grace."

1. It is plain, first, that if God is seated on a throne as a God of majesty and power, this boldness must be altogether different from *fearless presumption or irreverent freedom*. The glory of Jehovah when seated on a throne, even though that throne is a throne of grace, is enough to make creatures whose "habitation is in the dust" and who are "crushed before the moth," fear before him, and approach him with reverence. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." "The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble. He sitteth between the cherubim, let the earth be moved."

There is in some professors of the gospel, an unhallowed familiarity with the sacred name of God, which makes some of their brethren tremble. They seem to forget both his character and their own; to forget that he is that "high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," and they sunk almost to a level with the brutes that perish. They appear as though they thought it a mark of a high degree of grace to bring down Jehovah from his lofty throne, and to degrade him to a level with themselves. Beware, my brethren, of this unholy boldness. It is not the offspring of grace, but of ignorance and pride. We stand before the throne of God as sinners; what we ask for there is mercy; and surely the conviction that we are sinners and need mercy ought to fill us with abasement, with reverence, and godly fear. We are criminals suing for a pardon; our boldness then must be the boldness of a humble penitent, cherishing in his heart a lively sense of his meanness and a deep conviction of his guilt.

2. The boldness of which the apostle speaks, is opposed also to *self-will*, and must consequently include in it submission to the will of God. If he is a sovereign on a throne, we must give him, in our approaches to him, a sovereign's authority. We must go to him as those who desire to be wholly

subject to him, to be governed by his wisdom and ordered by his will. Whatever we ask for, we must ask for it with this prayer on our lips and in our heart, "Father, not my will, but thine be done."

3. This boldness is opposed further to *restraint in prayer*, and implies a humble and holy freedom in our addresses to God. If we are habitually living in his faith and fear, we may come to his throne, not as strangers and foreigners, but as those who are of his household. We are not to go to him as a harsh master and unfeeling ruler; we are not to appear before him, as the slave appears before his tyrant; but we are to go to him as children to a father, a forgiving father, a tender-hearted, yea, a heavenly father. If we could but always approach him in this spirit, how sweet would be our fellowship with him, how successful our petitions! Nothing would appear to us too great, nothing too trifling, to lay before him. We should pour out our hearts before him; open to him our every want, and fear, and sorrow; and find in him the sweetest sympathy and the tenderest love.

4. This boldness is opposed lastly to *distrust and unbelief*, and includes a persuasion that God has grace to bestow and is willing to bestow it, and that we are authorized to ask for and expect it. It is the boldness of faith, which the apostle recommends; a confidence, not in our own merits, but in sovereign mercy; a faith in Jesus, and such a faith in him, as triumphs over fears and suspicions, and rises to the confidence of hope.

This confidence is quite consistent with that humility which becomes us as sinners; indeed it is closely connected with it. At the very moment when the Christian is enabled to exercise the greatest boldness in his wrestling with God, he has a far deeper sense of sin than he has at other seasons, a livelier conviction of his own utter vileness. The Christian's life is indeed a riddle, a mystery, to the merely speculative professor of the gospel. It brings together so many different and apparently opposite affections, and so sweetly and yet so strangely blends them together, that he who has not experienced "the power of godliness," cannot comprehend it. O that our understanding may be opened to understand the mysteries of the Christian's hidden life, and our hearts softened and enlarged to enjoy its secret pleasures!

From a review of the subject we have been considering, we may learn *how mercy and grace may be obtained*. They are to be obtained by prayer. But this implies more than appears on the first view. It implies that we deeply feel our need of mercy and grace. It implies, not a mere acknowledgment only that we are sinners, not a cold sense that we need mercy; but such a conviction of our sin and necessity, as fills our souls, interests our feelings, abides with us wherever we go, and daily sinks deeper and deeper into our minds. Without this, our prayers will be empty breath, our religion a lifeless form.

Here it is where thousands err. Their religion has not their own utter vileness

and helplessness for its foundation. Hence there is no abiding spirit of prayer in them, no settled love to Christ, no clinging to the cross, no cleaving to God. This deeply seated sense of poverty and guilt must precede every real prayer for mercy. The heart must be humbled, as well as softened. Till this point is gained, nothing is done. Here then let us begin. Let this be our first prayer, that we may have a heartfelt sense of our need of mercy and grace. If we have but this, brethren, O who can tell how ready God is to receive, how willing to pardon and to help us? Could we but once see and feel the thousandth part of his willingness to bless us, we should want no further encouragement to lead us at once with boldness to his throne.

Here too we may see *a part of our vast obligations to the cross of Christ.*

How was this throne of grace erected? By whom was it built? Who prevailed on infinite Justice to sit and reign on it? We know the answer—Jesus who died for us, and rose again, and is now seated on the right hand of God. It was the blood of the Lamb that was slain, which first made the throne of God a throne of grace to sinners; it is the Lamb that was slain, who still keeps it such. Though the building of this throne cost us nothing, it cost the man who is the fellow of Jehovah, tears and groans, a life of misery and a death of anguish. Who then that feels his need of mercy and grace, can make light of Jesus Christ, the Saviour? Who can hear of his dying love, and yet despise it?

We may infer, lastly, from the words before us, that *the man who lives without prayer, lives without the mercy and the grace of God;* that he who has never sought these blessings at a throne of grace, is utterly destitute of them. How then am I living? If I am a stranger to secret, humble, heartfelt prayer, my character is awful, and my state is perilous. I stand before the Almighty as an unpardoned, ungodly sinner. I am under the curse of the God who made me, and the object of his just abhorrence. What then will be my future condition, if I die in such a state? Where will my soul go, if death should come upon me, and find me destitute of mercy and grace? It must go into devouring fire and everlasting burnings. How is it then, that knowing and believing myself to be thus ready to perish, I can still live day after day without prayer? How is it that I am not hourly going for mercy to the throne of grace? My heart tells me that though I in some degree know that I need mercy, I am indifferent about obtaining it. If I could go to the throne of an earthly sovereign, and get a splendid estate or a proud title by merely asking for it, I should at once go, I should immediately be found there; but what are titles and estates, when compared with what God has to give, with mercy and grace? They are nothing. My reason tells me that they are nothing. And yet I cannot bring my senseless heart to seek these precious gifts of God. Let me strive then to get this desperately wicked heart awakened, softened, and changed. It is a dreadful evil within me; let me no longer trifle with it, lest it destroy me. Let me take it to Jesus, that it may be made a new and holy heart. Let me no longer keep from this blessed Saviour. I will this very

hour begin to pray. This very hour shall see me a weeping suppliant in the dust before his throne. There will I lie, and pray, and plead; there will I seek mercy and grace; there will I smite on my breast, and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."