NOTES OF ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM C. BURNS,

MISSIONARY OF THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIAN

CHURCH TO CHINA.

EDITED BY

M. F. BARBOUR,

Author of "The Way Home," "The Child of the Kingdom,"

"The Soul-Gatherer," &c.

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

1869.

II.

COVENANT MERCY.

[*April 6th 1840, a Farewell Address given in St Leonard's Church, to the Converts gathered in during the Revival in Perth, after three months labour there, on his leaving for Aberdeen.*]

"FOR THE MOUNTAINS SHALL DEPART, AND THE HILLS BE REMOVED; BUT MY KINDNESS SHALL NOT DEPART FROM THEE, NEITHER SHALL THE COVENANT OF MY PEACE BE REMOVED, SAITH THE LORD THAT HATH MERCY ON THEE."—*Isaiah LIV. 10.*

THIS promise is threefold. God has given to His church love and peace. These blessings come to the saints through God's covenant. These blessings and that covenant are everlasting. Jehovah confers on his people mercy, peace, and kindness. He shows mercy, free, sovereign, unconditional, not connected in any degree with what he finds in the sinner, but flowing from God alone, being His prerogative, peculiar to himself. He showeth mercy; the Lord is merciful and gracious. How much is contained in that golden sound, Mercy, mercy!

Believer, what does it bring to your mind to hear of mercy? Ah! it is sweet when you are weighed down with a sense of guilt and sin—when you see yourself all but lost, to hear of mercy. You feel how deeply you need it, that if there were no mercy with Jehovah, you must perish. You found out your need of mercy when first you saw your sin to be transgression against an infinitely holy God. When the sinner begins to learn something of what Jehovah is, somewhat of the perfections of His glorious nature and character, he is overwhelmed, he cannot conceive any possibility of salvation; such is the distance separating the holy Creator from an offending and unholy creature.

If in this world we were, but for an instant, to see sin as God sees it, we should die, the sight would drink up our spirits; but this is not permitted, sin is not yet unveiled to the eye of the believer, his capacities are not made to sustain the revelation of the glory of God. He sees mercy now, but in a dim light. Ah! but in heaven, *how* glorious, *how* amazing, *how* overpowering! It will be the anthem of the redeemed, "There is mercy with God." New harps they will need for this song, ever new. You know little of sin, you that have seen it most. You have seen but the smallest part of it, and God sees it all, and looks at it with an infinitely holy eye, from the least to the greatest of it. It seems wonderful to you to have pardoning mercy extended to your heinous sins, and the least of them looks heinous beheld by the light of God's

word. Ah! what will you think of mercy when you reach the blessed shore of heaven!

Unbeliever! your eye rests on the sin you committed last. It looks blackest. But God sees each offence, since ever you began to sin, in its full enormity; his eye sees no difference, time does not change guilt in his sight. The sin of last year is as vivid as the one you are now committing. Old man! the sins of sixty years are all as vividly before God as those of twenty, and every one of them seems to him more black than any sin was ever seen to be by man. You are a vile object in his sight. One sin, and another, and another, on to millions, with their aggravations, rise in the dark catalogue of crime in God's reckoning book against you. Believer, such a catalogue once stood there against you, but there was mercy with God. On that word your hopes are built. Do you not see the glorious sovereignty of his mercy, full, because blotting out all sin, even the greatest; free, because unmerited, unpurchased, unconditional, and offered to all.

It is sad to hear how some of God's people speak of mercy. From the way in which God is generally pleased to bring them to Himself, they seem to think that their convictions and repentance must come first, and then afterwards the pardon of God through Christ is given, thus putting their tears and humiliation as almost a condition appointed by God.

This will never give you an exalted idea of the sovereignty of God's mercy in Christ; oh never! Dear believers, brethren in Christ, forget *yourselves* altogether: look beyond yourselves. Look back as far as you can into eternity, and hear Jehovah by an act of grace proclaiming your pardon, choosing you, in spite of everything in yourself, as an object of mercy. He waited not to pardon you, till He saw you beginning to melt at the thought of His love, or to repent at the thought of your sins. He pardons like a God. He loved you while you were still in your sins, and set His heart to deliver you. He loves you now, and He *will* deliver you. He loved you long before the foundations of the world were laid, and He will love you on. Had it depended in the slightest degree on you, where had you been now? Not saved. He loved us just because he loved us. He showed us mercy because He *will* have mercy.

There are different ways of showing mercy. You may do it in a kind way, or you may do it as a tyrant would to a slave. Now, the Lord's loving-kindness is gloriously manifested in His mercy. His children do not always trust Him for this: they ofttimes dishonour Him, by accounting Him a hard Master and not a tender Father. Some of you suffered much at the beginning of your course from the fear of condemnation and conviction of sin. You judged the Lord's dealings as harsh and cruel, and you said, "Surely His purposes towards me are not good, He cannot love me, or I should not suffer thus." But what are you thinking of His dealings *now*, when you are lifted

out of the miry clay and standing on the rock? Are you not singing, "He hath done all things well?" and now you would not wish to have been without any of the suffering you had to endure. He has brought you by a way that you knew not, just that He might reveal to you the more brightly the purposes of His love.

The paths through which we are led seem often crooked, and rough, and dark while we are in them, but when we have come through them, they look all straight, and the path will yet be seen to have been the shortest, and safest, and easiest, that we could have taken. So shall it appear when we reach heaven. There are many dark providences in the course of God's dealings with His people, which they will never understand in this lower world, but which shall yet draw from them the eternal hallelujah; every one of them will then lie unfolded to the eye, replete with loving-kindness.

The beautiful figure in the beginning of our text makes all explanations regarding the stability of the covenant unnecessary. Since the flood, these hills have not changed. Immutable, they stood looking down on our fathers' graves, as they soon will look down on ours, seeming to mock at man and his concerns, and to tower over his littleness. But these very mountains will pass away, while the elements are melting with fervent heat. Your souls, believers, will then be entering into the joy of your Lord, standing secure at Emmanuel's side, in the kingdom which cannot be moved. The mountains shall depart, but the covenant of peace shall not remove. It remains immoveable from the nature of the contracting parties. It was formed between the Father and Jesus the Prince of Peace, whose goings are from everlasting. Doubting believers! you would not be so full of fears if you would think more of this. You vacillate, and change, and waver. The covenant has nothing to do with *you*, you are not one of the contracting parties. All you have to do is to become interested in it, by believing that Emmanuel has satisfied divine justice and reconciled you to God, and then at once to rejoice in the well-ordered covenant.

See what confirms the covenant. It is the authority of God. It is Jehovah's seal. It is, "Thus saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee." Is He man that He should lie? How often, believer, do you think of the Lord as if He were one like yourself? supposing that when you change Eternal Love fluctuates. Look back and see Him loving you in a past eternity, for no reason but that He set His heart upon you. Look forward and see Him receiving you with glory. Not even sin can change His love to you. Will a believer sin because grace abounds? When a man comes within an approach to that, it only shows that he has nothing to do with the covenant. But you, believers, who would rather die than pierce Emmanuel afresh by sin, to you we say, that the sin you have committed never can have changed the nature of an everlasting covenant: you can never fall away from the covenant if once you have an

interest in it. You may fall in the covenant (and in a way to destroy your present peace, and bring down Jehovah's chastening hand), but you never can fall *out* of the covenant.

If sin grieves you, if you forsake it, His kindness shall yet return to you, the covenant of His peace shall not be removed, saith the Lord, who hath mercy on thee. Mercy was needed to predestinate you; mercy to elect and call you; mercy to justify you; mercy to begin the glorious work of sanctification in your soul; and mercy shall open the golden gate of glory. Mercy pardoned your first offence; but for mercy the least of them would have sunk you into hell; and no more than mercy was required to pardon the blackest ever committed by man. How can you lose a part in a covenant whose very pledge and bond is mercy! There is no room in it for a repenting sinner's perdition. Mercy never condemned a man when justice had been satisfied. That no doubts may remain, and as if to prevent the very possibility of fear, it is the LORD WHO *hath mercy,* that sends the message to you.

Believer, will you try to live as in sight of that great white throne, and you will rejoice? Why live so far below your privileges as to be cast down or distressed at anything that can befall you here? Anticipate heaven! Look forward, forward. Get on a very few years by faith, bound over them, and you are beyond this sphere of mortality, and earth has passed away. Rise far, far above mist and shadow, cloud and darkness, and get into the ethereal blue sky of God's eternal love. Won't that make you holy? Ah! no man that lives much in heaven, can look on sin without abhorrence.

In parting with you, we have no farewell to say but this: Come to Christ *now*. Let him reign over you. And you, dear lambs of the flock, keep *close* to Christ. Ah! you were never so happy before; continue, then, ever where you now are, sitting at the feet of Jesus. We *shall meet* at the great white throne; till then you need none other arm around you but Christ's to keep you from falling. You have Christ—you have heaven. Blessed portion of the saints! Thrice happy are you; in due time you shall rise to glory, and so shall you be ever with the Lord.

As His redeemed, you will have a high place there. Angels have but the angels' place. Glorious they are, and they excel in strength; but you will be nearer the throne than cherubim or seraphim, for you are joint-heirs with Christ. What a glorious destiny is yours! To His angels He hath given their places, their offices, their beauty, their glory, and they serve Him day and night. To you He has given His Son—even the Only-begotten, the unspeakable gift. It is one of the most glorious of his titles now, that he is *Saviour;* and angels have got a new song unconceived of even in heaven till Jesus died, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," and they hymn the anthem with a wonder ever new. Look up, and sing with the countless multitude. Their names were once as unworthy and as vile as yours, but they were written

from all eternity in blood, in the Lamb's book of life. Will it not be heaven to be with Jesus, who washed your sin out in His own blood? to bask in the golden rays of a sun that has even now risen upon you?

Might we but hope that we should *all* meet on the right hand! We shall *not* all be there. Such a thing never happened yet. Who in this vast assemblage consents to that awful thought? *Who* is saying, "*I* shall not be there, I shall be on the left hand?" Can it be? "I am determined to go to hell." Not in words, but practically, has it been said by many in this city, who have openly opposed this work of God. Many have mocked it; some now present have mocked at it all along; some here have, perhaps, come to mock again. Will you mock at the day of judgment? Will you mock the Judge? Dear friends, they do not mock in hell. And you mistake much if you think you can hurt God's servants by mocking them, or retard God's work, or keep one penitent out of heaven. The everlasting arm is round each trembling believer; you hurt no one but yourself, and you will feel this bitterly to all eternity.

Some members have been taken out of *your* family, and you are left. You, man, have to say, I am yet a drunkard. You, I am dishonest still. You, I am a Sabbath breaker still. You, I am a swearer still. You, I still am unclean; I have been warned, I have been entreated, I have held out against everything; I am unchanged, I am filthy still.

It will be sad from hell to look back to nights like these, when so many were converted savingly around you, and came under the power of the Spirit of our God. It will be sad to remember *how near* Jesus came, and how you all but touched Him in the passing by—to remember that it was *there* and *then* that you refused His love. To you, dear fellow-sinners, we say no more. We have sought to present to you a law condemning, a God incensed, justice provoked, hell opened, Jesus a Saviour—and *He is waiting now.*

Many there are whom we cannot reach: who put themselves at a distance from the word, and seek to encase themselves in worldliness. There are the proud, the rich, the great; there are ladies and gentlemen that will not be awakened till judgment,—impervious to the darts of terror, deaf to the sweet calls of Emmanuel's love. How sad it will be for you, my friends, to find out that your name has been omitted in the Book of Life! Many a viler name than yours will be found in it. There are many now in hell who have not committed half the sins that some now in heaven did. Many a larger and blacker account than yours you will see blotted out with blood. Many whom you have despised as criminals, as profane, you will see passing into glory when you are going away to make your bed in hell.

I was struck tonight on coming here, to find the multitude standing without the locked gates, because the church was full, and as they stood, some wept that they could not enter the sanctuary. I thought of the awful sentence to be pronounced when the *door is shut;* and I told them they had got a bet-

ter sermon tonight than they could have got in church. “Take Christ away with you; the heavenly temple is not yet full.”

• • • • • • • • • • •

In parting, dear young believer, remember these lines,—

“Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

He is never more disappointed than when his temptations drive men to Christ. He, then, is the means of driving a soul to its fortress, its security. Prayer is strength. No Christian can thrive without being much alone with God. None who are so can do otherwise than thrive. Fight by prayer when you are fainting. As to your companionships, try to be most *where you will be nearest to Jesus.* Young Christian, be much in your closet, and He cannot forsake you. Pray for us! Pray for your minister. Some people seem to think it is casting a *slur* on their minister when they are told to pray for him. No godly minister will despise his people’s prayers. It was a *slur* that was cast on Paul; and the minister who is too proud to ask the prayers of the saints, is too proud to be honoured in the conversion of souls.

Conclude by singing these verses,—

“Our souls, we know, when He appears,
  Will bear His image bright,
And all His glories full disclosed
  Shall open to our sight.

“A hope so great and so divine,
  May trials well endure,
And purge the soul from sense and sin,
  As Christ himself is pure.”