

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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MCM

PREFATORY NOTE

ALTHOUGH the Bishop of Liverpool has published many books—Commentaries, Biographies, and Theological Dissertations—he has never published a volume of sermons.

When his many friends heard that he was about to resign the See of Liverpool, they urged him to publish a volume of his sermons as a “memorial” of his *sixty years*’ ministry. The Bishop kindly consented to do so, and invited me to make a selection from his MSS. and to prepare the sermons for the press. I need hardly say that I willingly undertook the task as a “labour of love” for my aged Bishop. The selection I have made for publication sets forth the great doctrines of our Faith—Sin, Redemption, Regeneration, and Sanctification. I have also added sermons which call attention to the *Practical* side of Christianity, and which especially emphasise the “DUTIES” of the Christian life. The closing sermons proclaim the coming of our Lord; the Reward of His Saints; and the Rest of Heaven.

Friends, who knew of the preparation of these sermons for the press, have been praying that the “message of God” which they contain may bring blessing to many thousands. In the sure and certain hope that His Word will not return unto Him void I have prepared this volume of sermons by the first Bishop of Liverpool—and in this hope it is sent forth.

T. J. MADDEN,
Archdeacon of Warrington,
LIVERPOOL, *March 1st, 1900.*

The Bishopric of Liverpool was declared vacant on March 3rd, 1900. [Bishop Ryle died 10th June 1900. (ET editor)]

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

“These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”—REV. vii. 14, 15, 16, 17.

THIS is a very glorious account, and yet we need not wonder, for it was a vision of heavenly things: you may call it a short glimpse within the vail which separated this world from the world to come. We read in the verses before our text, that the apostle John saw in the spirit a great multitude which no man could number, clothed with white robes, and bearing palms in their hands, standing before the throne and before the Lamb: and not knowing himself who or what these might be, he received information from one of the elders or chief angels, and was told in the words you have heard, that these were the blessed company of all faithful people, the redeemed out of every nation and kindred and tongue, the true children of God, the heirs of everlasting salvation.

I propose this morning to consider fully the account which this elder gave. I counsel you, beloved, to search and see what you know of it in your own selves. The day shall come when the sun shall become black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become as blood, and the stars of heaven shall fall unto the earth, and they who are strangers to the character described in our text shall find it had been better for them if they had never been born. Blessed are they who are not ashamed to confess that they seek a more abiding city than this world, even a heavenly one, and count all things loss if they can only win Christ and be found in Him.

Now there are three points to be examined in our text.

I. First, where did these saints come from whom St. John saw.

II. Second, how they had been able to reach the place where he saw them.

III. Third and last, what was their reward.

I. First, then, we learn that God’s saints have come out of great tribulation—that is, they have come out of a world full of sin and danger, a world in which they have so much to encounter which is hurtful to their souls that you may truly call it a place of great tribulation. How strange that seems! this earth so fair and lovely as it appears, so full of everything to make life enjoyable, this earth on which millions do set all their affections and have not a thought beyond it, is a wilderness beset with trials and difficulties to every true believer. Write this down on the tablet of your memory, that if you make up your mind to follow Christ and have your soul saved, you will sooner or later have to go through great tribulation.

Brethren, why are these things so? Because the world you live in is a fallen world, the devil is the prince of it, and by far the greater part of the men and women on it have shut their eyes and given themselves up to his service. Once become a follower of Christ, you will see iniquity abounding on every side, you will see your blessed Saviour's laws trampled under foot, you will find the immense majority of those around you to be spiritually dark, sleeping and dead—some altogether thoughtless, some resting on a form of godliness without the power; and if you love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, to see your Redeemer thus despised will make the world a place of tribulation.

But this is not all. The earthly-minded, the thoughtless, will never let you hold on your way in peace. Oh no! you are condemning their practices and fashions, you are a witness against their deadness and neglect of religion; and so if you set your face towards Zion they will try to turn you back. Perhaps it will be laughter, perhaps it will be hard words; one day they will accuse you of pride, another of self-conceit; sometimes they will annoy you with arguments, sometimes they will avoid your company; but, one way or another, you will soon discover that the worldly-minded will never let you go quietly to heaven. You cannot please them. You may exercise yourself like Paul to have a conscience void of offence towards all men; it matters not, you cannot serve the Lord and Mammon, and if you walk with God, you will find your way is spoken against by nearly all.

And then there is your own heart—deceitful, treacherous, and cold—the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit warring with the flesh; your readiness to make excuses, your deadness in the use of means, your wandering thought in prayer, your lack of faith in sorrow, your presumptuous self-confidence in joy. O Christian, you have an enemy within which needs your constant watchfulness; you have a fountain of trials in your own breast; you will have daily occasion to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. And add to this those cares which you have in common with all children of Adam—sickness, disease and pain, the loss of property, the unkindness of friends, the daily toil for a livelihood, the fear of want, the many nameless causes of anxiety which every week almost brings round, and say whether it be not true that all God's people come out of great tribulation. They must deny themselves, they must take up the cross, they must reckon on many a trial, if they would enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Mark well, beloved, this truth—the path to glory has been always filled with thorns; it is the experience of all those holy men who have left us an example that we should walk in their steps: Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Job, and Daniel, there was not one of them who was not perfected through sufferings.

We are all too much disposed to think a time may come when we shall have

a season of repose and not be harassed with these vexations and disappointments. Almost every one supposes he is tried more than his neighbours; but let us not be deceived—this earth is not our rest; it is a place for working, not for sleeping. Here is the reason that so many run well for a time, and seem to have the love of Christ in their hearts, and yet, when persecution or affliction ariseth for the word's sake, they are offended. They had not counted the cost; they had reckoned on the reward without the labour; they had forgotten this most important point in the character of God's saints—"they are men who have come out of great tribulation."

This seems a hard saying, but I would have you know these trials are laid on us for the most wise and merciful purposes. We live in such a fair and pleasant world, we are so surrounded with so much that is smiling and gay, that if we were not often obliged to taste of sickness and trial or disappointments, we should forget our heavenly home, and pitch our tents over against this Sodom. Therefore it is that God's people pass through great tribulations; therefore it is they are often called upon to suffer the sting of affliction and anxiety, or weep over the grave of those whom they have loved as their own soul. It is their Father's hand which chastens them; it is thus He weans their affection from things below and fixes them on Himself; it is thus He trains them for eternity, and cuts the threads one by one which bind their wavering hearts to earth. No doubt such chastening is grievous for the time, but still it brings many a hidden grace to light, and cuts down many a secret seed of evil; and we shall see those who have suffered most shining among the brightest stars in the assembly of heaven. The purest gold is that which has been longest in the refiner's furnace. The brightest diamond is often that which has required the most grinding and polishing. But our light affliction endureth but for a moment, and it worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; the saints are men who have *come out* of great tribulation, they are never left to perish in it; the last night of weeping will soon be spent, the last wave of trouble will have rolled over us, and then we shall have a peace which passeth all understanding; we shall be at home for ever with the Lord.

I repeat, this seems at first sight a hard saying; and yet it is a true one. Count up the enemies which encompass the children of God,—the world with its unkindnesses or its snares, and seductions, the flesh with its unceasing backwardness and indifference to the Lord's service, the devil with his arts and devices,—and see whether you could give a more correct picture of the saints' experience than may be found in the words, "these are they which came out of great tribulation." An unconverted man may not understand this, and a thoughtless man may not consider it; they neither know nor care about this spiritual conflict; it is foolishness to them; but they that are born again, and have learned the value of their own souls, can set to their seals that it is all true.

II. The second question rising out of the text is this: "How did these shining

ones reach that blessed place where John saw them?” Think not it was their own righteousness which brought salvation, and their own strength which upheld them: the cross will surely lead to the crown, but the cross will never deserve it; not all the tears which they have shed, not all the patience they have shown in tribulation, could ever avail to make atonement for transgression, or wash away one single sin. What says the apostle? “They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” They have not been ashamed to acknowledge their iniquities, and they have laid them all before the Lord Jesus Christ, and for His cross and passion, and for His righteousness’ sake they have sought a free forgiveness, and they have found it. Lay this to heart, all ye that are wise in your own eyes and holy in your own sight. No doubt there were prophets and righteous men of old, men who had wrought miracles and given their bodies to be burned, men who had been valiant for the truth even unto death, in that great multitude which John beheld; but none came boasting of his own attainments and clothed in his own apparel,—they were all washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

And lay this well to heart, all ye that are pressed down with the burden of your sins, if any such there be, and dare not lift up your eyes to heaven. No doubt there were sinners before God exceedingly in that company, many who had been publicans and harlots, the very filth of the earth and offscouring of all things, and yet they found a place of forgiveness and, behold, they are washed, and white as the driven snow. They were in a world of tribulation like yourselves, but they found time to listen to the report of God’s ministers, and when they listened they believed; they did not think scorn of the goodly land before them; they did not make light of their Master’s invitations, but they loathed themselves for their past transgressions and forgetfulness, and with earnest supplication and prayer sought to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, and no sooner did they knock than the door was opened. They were not content with hearing of this fountain for sin and uncleanness, like many of yourselves, and talking of it as a thing to be admired, and very useful for others; they did not sit beside the pool of Bethesda without endeavouring to step in; but they cried, “Lord, have mercy, wash *me*, even *me* also,” and so they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God; they obtained a free pardon, and their iniquities were all taken out of the way. By nature they were as weak and timid and sinful and shortcoming as any among yourselves,—there is not a danger or an obstacle or a doubt or a discouragement in any of your minds with which they were not familiar,—and yet they were all saved by the free grace of God, they were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, they were more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Around that throne you would find many who used to be the vilest of the vile. Go up, and ask them, every one, “How did you come hither? whence got you that white robe?” They will answer you, “We

were once a generation without God in the world, without light and without hope, we cared for nothing but fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind, we were known as drunkards and revilers and fornicators; many a time we hardened our hearts against advice; many a careless neighbour did we follow to the grave, and tempted God to cut us off by continued impenitence; but at last our conscience spoke so loudly that we dared no longer delay; we tried to keep God's law, but we could not answer it one in a thousand, it brought us to flat despair; we made a great profession, and men said we were converted; but it would not do—sin lay upon us like a mountain, all unatoned for, and we were miserable. But we heard a voice, saying, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink,'—He that believeth on Me, though he were dead yet shall he live,' 'Come unto Me and I will give you rest,' and when we heard it, we went at once to the Lord Jesus Christ, we waited for nothing, we laid all our sorrows and all our wickedness before Him, and, behold, that very day we were healed and made whole, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." Such is the answer you would get from many in that company which the apostle saw.

This is the way you must walk in, if you would ever stand with them in glory. You must lay aside all pride and self-dependence, you must use the publican's prayer, you must believe yourself a miserable undeserving sinner, you must lay hold on the cross of Christ with a simple childlike faith, and pray that you may be washed in His blood and pardoned for His name's sake. Show me another way of salvation which will bring you peace at the last; I cannot find one in the Bible. I hear of men who live on many a long year without a thought about this precious washing in Christ's blood, this precious garment of Christ's righteousness, and yet can tell us they trust it will be all right with them at last; but I never hear that it is right, and if the Bible be true it is impossible. I see many who profess a belief in their need of this fountain for sin and uncleanness, but I fear they do no more than talk about it, they do not count all things loss until they are forgiven. But whether men will receive the doctrine or not, the foundation of God standeth sure, and though the saints of God do form a multitude which none can number, I cannot read of one who had not washed his robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

III. The third and last part of my text is that which describes the reward of the redeemed: "they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Here is a list of privileges; you have heard of tribulation, but it leads, you see, to comfort; you have heard of the cross, but the end is indeed a crown.

Now we can tell you something of the affliction of God's children, for we

are able to speak that we know; but when we have to treat of the glory which shall be revealed, we are on ground which human eye hath not seen, and we must be careful not to go beyond what is written.

The saints “shall serve God day and night.” There shall be no weariness in heaven; there shall be no earthly labours to distract our attention. Here, alas! the cares of the world are continually breaking in, and these poor frail bodies of ours do often tie us down to the earth by their weakness, even when the spirit is willing. We may be on the mount for a short season sometimes, but our powers are soon exhausted; but *there* we shall have no wandering thoughts, no distractions, no bodily wants, we shall never faint. How little indeed do we worship God in spirit and in truth; at our very best moments, how cold and dull we feel towards our blessed Redeemer, how willing to allow any excuse for shortening our prayers and diminishing our communion with our Father which is in heaven; but they that stand before the throne of God shall feel no fatigue, they will require no repose, they will count it their highest privilege to be continually singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and saying, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

But let us read on. “He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” They shall no longer walk by faith, and see through a glass darkly, they shall see face to face the God in whom they have believed, and behold His countenance as that of a familiar friend. They shall have no more dark seasons, they shall never feel that their beloved Lord is at a distance, they shall never tremble lest they compel Him to withdraw Himself by their lack of service, but they shall see Him as He is, and be for ever at His side. And if, while groaning in their body of sin, the Christian finds such peace and comfort in drawing nigh to God in prayer—if even in the flesh he has tasted that it is a joyful thing to pour out his heart before the throne of mercy—oh! who shall describe his blessedness when he shall find himself for ever in his Redeemer’s presence, and shall be told, It is finished, thou shalt no more go out? It is a pleasant thing to have the company of those we love: our very earthly happiness is incomplete while those who have the keys of our affection, the husband, the wife, the brother, the sister, the friends who are as our own souls, are far away; but there shall be no such incompleteness in heaven; there we shall have the presence of our glorious Lord before our eyes, who loved us and gave Himself for us, and paid the price of our salvation, even His own blood, and the Scripture shall be fulfilled which saith, “In Thy presence there is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

But we may not linger here. We read, “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.” They shall have no more wants and necessities; they shall no longer stand in need of daily application for the bread of life, and find their souls

starving in the wilderness of this world; they shall not walk as pilgrims trembling lest their spiritual food should not support them, and thirsting after a fuller draught of the water of life; but they shall find that prophecy made good, "When I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied." But again, "the sun shall not light on them, nor any heat." There shall be no more trial and persecution. There shall not be one reviling tongue nor one ensnaring temptation. The mockers and the flatterers and the scoffers shall be silent for ever, the fiery darts of the wicked will all be quenched; there will be nothing to mar and disturb the Christian's peace. The time will have come at last when he may rest; he will be far above the scene of his old conflicts, and the strife shall never be renewed.

But what is the crowning privilege? "The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The Lord Jesus Christ Himself shall minister to their comforts; the same kind hand which raised them from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, which healed their spiritual diseases, and brought them health and peace, and made them new creatures upon earth, the same hand shall welcome them in heaven, and conduct them as highly favoured guests to a banquet of happiness, such as eye hath not seen, neither can it enter into the heart of man to conceive. Time was when He sought them out as wandering sheep in the wilderness of this world, and made them members of His little flock by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and refreshed their weary, heavy laden souls with the water of life. And the same Jesus who began the good work in the days of their tribulation upon earth, the same Good Shepherd shall complete the work in heaven. Here they have tasted something of the streams, a little trembling company, from north and south, east and west, but there they will be gathered round the fountain itself, and there will be one fold and one shepherd, one heart and one mind, and none shall make them afraid. And then there shall be no more weeping, for "God Himself shall wipe away all tears." A dwelling-place in which there shall be no weeping! I know no part of heaven more difficult to imagine. We live in a world of sorrow, a very vale of tears; tears for ourselves and tears for others, tears over our own shortcomings, tears over the unbelief of those we love, tears over disappointed hopes, tears over the graves of those on whom our affections are set, and all because of sin: there would have been no sorrow if Adam had never fallen, but our very weeping is a proof of sin.

Yet it shall not always be so: a day is still to come when sadness shall flee away, and God Himself shall say, Refrain thy voice from weeping, for the former things are passed away. There shall be no sadness in heaven, for there shall be no sin; the days of our tribulation shall be forgotten; we shall be able at last to love our God without coldness, to reverence His holiness without torment, to trust Him without despair, to serve Him without weariness, without interruption, without distraction; the days of weakness and corruption will be past, and we

shall be like unto our Lord in holiness as well as happiness, in purity as well as immortality.

And now, beloved, let me ask you what is the purpose for which the Church of God has been established upon earth, and ministers have been appointed to watch for your souls? What is the object of Bibles and Sacraments, and prayer and preaching? Is it not simply this, that you may be numbered with the saints in glory everlasting, that you may enjoy those blessings you have heard described?

Then search and see what solemn questions spring out of my text. Have you taken up the cross? are you denying yourself? do you know anything of this spiritual tribulation? Be very sure except you will declare yourself decidedly on the Lord's side, and fight His battle with the fashion of the world, and the lusts of the flesh, and the wiles of the devil; you will never stand before the throne in robes of white and carry the palm of victory in your hand.

That carelessness about sin, that trifling with temptation, that earnestness about the things of time, that forgetfulness about eternity, that readiness to swim with the tide about religion, that unwillingness to become more serious than your neighbours, that fear of being thought righteous overmuch, that love of the world's good opinion,—is this what you call coming out of great tribulation? Is this sowing to the Spirit? Is this striving and labouring after eternal life? Oh, look to your foundations, set your house in order. No empty trust in God's mercy will ever save you. You were not baptised unto idleness and indifference. Without a real hatred of sin, and a real forsaking of sin, Christ can profit you nothing. You never can be made white with the blood of the Lamb, except you desire to have this earth's defilements really washed away.

And then consider, lastly, O unhappy children of this world, could you be happy in the heaven you have heard described? Know ye not all, that sickness and death do seldom work a change of heart, they seldom plant in man new taste and new desires?—and do you think that men who count it a great matter to come to church, and find the services a weariness and rejoice when they are over, will such be ready to serve God day and night in His temple? Will those who take no pleasure in drawing nigh to Jesus in prayer, delight to be for ever in His presence and dwell with Him? Are you who never hunger and thirst after righteousness, are you to be satisfied with the living fountains of water? Are you who never know what it is to weep over sin and corruption, who never grieve over the wickedness of this world, are you likely to understand the privilege of that rest when God shall wipe away all tears? Oh, no, it cannot be, it cannot be! Whatever a man sows he shall also reap; whatever we love in time we shall love in eternity; whatever we think wearisome now we shall think wearisome then. Ye must be born again, or heaven itself would be a miserable abode; there is no place there for the worldly-minded and profane. Ye must be renewed in the spirit of your minds, or ye will hear that dreadful voice, Friend,

how earnest thou in hither without a wedding-garment? Ye must become new creatures; and how long will you insult your Redeemer by putting it off? Oh! pray ye to the Lord Jesus Christ, while it is called today, to send His Holy Spirit on you; go to the fountain while the door of mercy is yet open, wash and be clean.

But blessed are all ye that mourn, for ye shall be comforted; blessed are ye that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for great is your reward in heaven. Ye have wept with them that weep, but ye shall soon rejoice with them that rejoice, and your joy shall no man take away. It is but a single step, and you shall be for ever with the Lord, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. The worm may destroy these bodies, and yet in the flesh ye shall see God, and your own eyes shall behold Him, and your own ears shall hear Him say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The saints whose faith and patience you have so often admired; the holy men and women of whom you have so often said, "Oh, that I were like them "; the ministers who have shown you the way of life, and implored you to be steadfast and unmoveable; the friends who advised you to come out of the world, and took sweet counsel with you about the kingdom of God; the beloved ones of your own house, who slept in Jesus and went home before you: all are there, all waiting to receive you, and there shall be no more parting, no more weeping, no more separation; and you, even you, this vile body being changed, shall sing the song of the redeemed: "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, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

In this world ye may have tribulation, but be of good cheer: your Lord and Saviour hath overcome the world.