

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BENEFITS FLOWING FROM REDEMPTION

I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land (Ezekiel 36:24).

Men's chief end is to glorify God; and God's chief end is to glorify himself. While that is an end worthy of the great Creator, it goes greatly to enlarge our interest in his works, and enhance their value in our eyes. That end gives loftiness to the humblest of them. When I know that for his own glory he paints each flower, gives the fish its silver scales, and sends forth the beetle armed in mail of gold, his creatures rise in my esteem.

It may look a sickly fancy, but one almost feels reluctant to destroy the humblest flower or insect, lest we should silence one of the ten thousand voices which form the choir of nature, and swell the praises of nature's God. Is there a child whose heart does not warm towards him who praises an earthly father, or speaks honorably of the good man's memory? Now, the very same feeling inclines a child of God to love all the works that do his Father honor; and of all men he cannot fail to enjoy the most exquisite pleasure in the beauties of nature, who carries to her fields a pious spirit, and sees his Father mirrored in them all; hears his praise sung in the voices of groves, or pealed in the roar of thunder.

Such was the spirit of one—a venerable patriarch—who shed on a very humble station the luster of brilliant graces. When the storm sent others in haste to their homes, he was wont to leave his own, and to stand with upturned face, raised eye, and with his gray head uncovered, to watch the flash, and listen to the music of the roaring thunder.

How fine his reply to those who expressed their wonder at his aspect and attitude—**“It's my father's voice, and I like well to hear it.”** What a sublime example of the perfect love that casteth out fear! **“Happy is that people that is in such a case, yea happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”**

Now, as it ennobles nature—so that the sun shines more bright, and the flowers look more beautiful, and there is a grander majesty in the rolling sea—when we know that God does all things for his own glory, it greatly enhances the preciousness of salvation to know, that in the kingdom of grace also he has the same end in view.

If God saves—not because we deserve mercy—but that his own great mercy may be illustrated in saving, ah! then there is hope for me—Yes, although thou wert an adulterer, a thief, a murderer, the vile wretch who spit in Jesus' face the ruffian who forced the thorny crown deep into his bleeding brow, although thou wert that very soldier who buried the lance in Jesus' side, and just returning from Calvary, with the blood of Christ's heart red on the spear head, I would stop thee in thy way to say, there is hope for thee. Oh, this has inspired with hope souls which had otherwise despaired, and gilded the edges of guilt's darkest cloud.

In circumstances where we would have been dumb—opening not the mouth—when called to the dying bed of vilest, lowest sin, it has unsealed our lips, and lent wings to prayer. Of the preacher, whose walk lies among the most wretched, hopeless, and abandoned, this truth says, since God saves for his own glory, haste, **“loose him, and let him go”**—go to offer Christ (as I do to-day) to the chief of sinners; like a sunbeam passing undefiled through the foulest atmosphere, go in thy heavenly purity where the basest of thy race is perishing, nor shrink from this loathsome guilt, but with Jesus' pity and Jesus' tears, lift up her dying head, and in the mercy of God in Christ, let her drink this wine of love out of its cup of gold.

If the worse a patient is, if the fiercer his fever burns, if the deeper his wound has penetrated, so much the greater is the glory of the physician who cures him; then the worse a sinner is, the greater Christ's glory when he saves him. But for this, that God in every case saves men, not out of regard to their merit, but his own glory, what could sustain the faith of him who, in preaching the gospel to unconverted men, has to run his horses on a rock, and ploughs there with oxen; to sow the seed of God's blessed word under the most unfavorable circumstances; to write sermons for dead men, and preach them to dry bones.

Nothing but faith in this could carry us to the top of Carmel, not seven, but seventy times seven, to look out over the sea of God's mercy for the cloud of blessing, and wait till it rise, and spread over the heavens, and discharge its treasures on a barren land. **“Seeing we have this ministry we faint not.”**

Having already attempted to show how God glorifies himself in redemption, we shall now address ourselves to the subject-matter of the text, where we are taught that redemption brings good to man as well as glory to God. And it appears from the text—

*I. In carrying out the work of redemption, God will call his people out of the world. **“I will take you from among the heathen.”***

By nature his people are no better than other people. They were no better till grace made them so. The Apostle settles the point by the question, **“Who maketh thee to differ from another?”** and the confession, **“By the grace of God I am what I am.”**

And our Lord teaches the same doctrine in these brief but expressive parables—

- **“Two women are grinding at the mill; one is taken, and another left.”**
- **“Two men are in one field; the one is taken, and the other left.”**

- **“Two men are in one bed; one is taken, and another left.”**

Christ states the truth, and how often does Providence supply the commentary? Here are two children; they were born of one mother; nestled in one bosom; rocked in one cradle; they were reared under the same roof; grew up under the same training; sat under the same ministry; and in death not divided, they are sleeping together in the same grave. But the one is taken, and the other left.

This, a child of God, ascends to heaven; the other, alas! is lost. Who dare challenge the justice of God? Mysterious subject! He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. **“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”**

The truth is, that by nature this world is sunk in sin, and all men are in a sense idolaters. In the days of old, it is said that Egypt had more gods than men. Elsewhere than in Egypt, everywhere, as the Bible says, **“there be lords many and gods many.”**

The Hindu reckons his divinities by thousand and tens of thousands; but the world has a larger Pantheon—as many gods as it has objects, be they innocent or guilty, which usurp the place of the Lord, and dethrone him in the creature’s heart. Nor are men less idolaters if drunkards, though they pour out no libation to Bacchus—the god of wine; nor less idolaters, if impure, that they burn no incense at the shrine of Venus; nor less idolaters, if lovers of wealth, that they do not mold their gold into an image of Plutus, and, giving a shrine to what lies hoarded in their coffers, offer it their morning and evening prayers.

He has been an idolater, who, rebelling against Providence, follows the hearse of a confined god; he made an idol of wife or child; and now, when the robber of our homes has stolen them away, and bears them off to the grave, the feelings of that man’s heart may be expressed in Micah’s complaint to the Danite robbers, **“Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me. What aileth thee?”**

Since, man, therefore, in his natural state, is—although not in fact—in spirit as much an idolater as the pagans of any heathen land, may it not be justly said of all who have been converted by the grace of God, that he has **“taken them from among the heathen?”**

II. The power of divine grace is strikingly displayed in this effectual calling.

It is a remarkable fact, that while the baser metals are often diffused through the body of the rocks, gold and silver lie in veins—collected together in distinct metallic masses. They are in the rocks, but not of the rocks.

Some believe that there was a time, long gone by, when—like the other metals—these lay in intimate union with the mass of rock, until, by virtue of some mysterious electric agency, their scattered atoms were put in motion, and, being made to pass through the solid stone, were aggregated in those shining veins, where they now lie to the miner’s hand. Gold and silver are the emblems of God’s people.

And as by some power in nature God has separated these emblems from the base and common earths, even so by the power of his grace he will separate all his chosen from a reprobate and rejected world. They shall come at his call; He will **“say to the north, Give up; and to the south. Keep not back; bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.”** The corruption of nature, circumstances of temptation, an evil world, the hostility of hell, all interpose between his purpose and the objects of his mercy. The difficulties in the way tower up into a mountain! Fear not. God will make up the number of his chosen ones. **“Who art thou, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.”**

His grace shall prove sufficient for the work. No doubt it has a great work to do. Think from what an abominable life and from what abandoned company God calls some to grace on earth and glory in heaven. Look at this Manasseh or at that Magdalene. How different their Sabbaths now from what once they were! How different their society now from the associates with whom once, in mad and frantic dance, they went whirling round the mouth of the burning pit!

Another, and another, and another plunge into the abyss, and they drown the lost one’s perishing cry in louder music; and in giddier whirl they dance on, as little deterred by the fate of their fellows, as the insects that on an autumn evening dash one upon another into the flame of our candle.

Ah, when God’s saints look down from their elevation into the depths where grace descended and found them, and from whence it raised them, they are not satisfied to sing, “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the thrones of glory;” they tune their harp-strings to a higher strain. Lost in wonder, love, and praise, they are ready to adopt the words which a humble-minded but eminent Christian insisted should be engraved upon her tombstone—**“How great is thy mercy toward me.” “Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell?”**

It is in a state of deep ungodliness—without God, without the love of God, without the holiness that shall see God, without true purity of heart or peace of conscience—that grace finds all it saves.

Such is not the judgment of the world. And I do not deny but that many are very lovely in the bloom and beauty of natural virtue—so beautiful, that we cannot help loving them. Is there sin in that? No; for Jesus loved the young ruler who yet refused to follow him. But then, with much that is attractive in the graces of the natural man, they have the same nature, and lie under the same condemnation, as a world that liveth in wickedness, and lieth under sentence of death.

An old writer has said that “man in his natural state is half a devil and half a beast.”

How wonderful the grace which changes such a monster into the image of God, and converts the basest metal into the purest gold!

It is indeed amazing to see what grace will do, and where grace will grow; in what unlikely places God has his people, and out of what unlikely circumstances he calls them.

I have seen a tree crowning the summit of a naked rock; and there it stood—in search of food sending its roots out over the bare stone, and down into every cranny—securely anchored by these moorings to the stormy crag. We have wondered how it grew up there, amid such rough nursing, how it could have survived many a wintry blast, and where, indeed, it found food or footing. Yet, like one familiar with hardship and adversities, it has grown and lived; it has kept its feet when the pride of the valley has bent to the storm; and, like brave men, who think not of yielding, but nail their colors to the mast, it has maintained its proud position, and kept its green flag waving on nature's topmost battlements.

More wonderful than this, however, is it to see where the grace of God will live and grow. Tender exotic! plant brought from a more genial clime! one would suppose that it would require the kindest nursing and most propitious circumstances; yet look here—

- A Daniel is bred for God, and for the bravest services in his cause, in no pious home of Israel; he grows in saintship amid the impurities and effeminacy of a heathen palace.
- Paul was a persecutor, and is called to be a preacher—was a murderer, and becomes a martyr; once, no Pharisee so proud, now no publican so humble.

Like those fabled monsters, which, sailing on broad and scaly wings, descended on their helpless prey with streams of fire issuing from their formidable mouths, he set off for Damascus, **“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.”**

Jesus descended in person to meet this formidable persecutor, and selected him for his chiefest apostle. He bids him wash the blood of Stephen from his hands, and go preach the gospel.

And where afterwards has this very man some of his most devoted friends? where, but in Caesar's household. What can more strikingly express the power of all-sufficient grace than the words of John Newton? One asked him whether he thought the heathen could be converted. “I have never doubted,” he said, “that God could convert the heathen, since he converted me.”

“Never despair” should be the motto of the Christian; and how should it keep hope alive under the darkest and most desponding circumstances, to see God calling grace out of the foulest sin? Look at this cold creeping worm! Playful childhood shrinks shuddering from its touch; yet a few weeks, and with merry laugh and flying feet, that same childhood, over flowery meadow is hunting an insect that never lights upon the ground, but—flitting in painted beauty from flower to flower—drinks nectar from their cups, and sleeps the summer night away in the bosom of their perfumes. If that is the same boy, this is no less the self-same creature. Change most wonderful! yet but a dull, earthly emblem of the divine transformation wrought on those, who are **“transformed by the renewing of their minds.”** Gracious, glorious change! Have you felt it? May it be felt by all of us! You have it here in this woman, who, grieved in her mind, lies a-weeping at the feet of Jesus. She was a sinner. Her condition had been the basest; her bread the bitterest; her company the worst. She is casting off her vile, sinful slough. She leaves it. She rises a new creature. The beauty of the Lord is on her; and now, with wings of faith and love wide outspread, she follows her Lord to heaven. How encouraging the wonders of converting grace! Let us despair of none —neither of ourselves nor anyone else.

III. *God will make up the number of his people.*

“I will gather you out of all countries.” There are some gatherings in this world which are largely alloyed with pain. Christmas or some birthday season comes round, summoning the members of a scattered family. The circle is again formed; but, like that of men who have been standing under Fire, and closing up their ranks, how is it contracted from former years! There are well-remembered faces, and voices, and forms, that are missing here; and the family group, which looks down from the picture, is larger than the living company met at table. Some are dead and gone—**“Joseph is not, and Simeon is not;”** and a dark cloud hangs on a mother’s brow, for on the cheek of yet another her anxious eye, quick to see, discovers an ominous spot that threatens to **“take Benjamin away.”**

There is a gathering, also, when, at the close of a hard-fought day, the roll of the regiment is called, and to familiar names there comes back no answer. How small the band who meet at night compared with the morning muster! As the day wore on, and the ranks grew thinner, and the “red line” grew less and less, they came back from each charge like a wave broken on an iron shore, and every shock they stood, and charge which they repelled, left broad gaps to fill.

And so, now when the fight is over, and the broken hosts muster on the field, to many a gallant man in vain the trumpet sounds, or war-pipe blows the gathering of the clan. Alas, for the day! They shall answer no trumpet but that which calls a world to judgment.

When daylight breaks on the shore of the shipwreck, there is also a mustering and reckoning of numbers. There, a mother clasps and kisses the living babe which the waves had plucked from her arms, and she never thought more to see; and here, a true brother cheers the boy whom he held in a grasp strong as death, while, with the other hand buffeting the billows, he bore him safely to the beach. But others, less fortunate, are wringing their hands in the wildness of their grief. Distracted mothers cry, “Where is my child?” Some, with the dead on their knees, sit stunned by sorrow; frightful to look upon! speechless, tearless, motionless, as if turned into stone; while others, wild, raving, frantic, stand on the shores of the devouring sea, and, stamping on its sands, demand back their dead.

These are mournful gatherings; and in striking contrast to them is this gathering on Melita’s shore:—It was a frightful storm; the coast unknown; the ship grounds in deep water, with nigh three hundred souls on board; the night before, the boats had been cut adrift, and now not a boat—if boats could live in such a swell—to save them.

The swimmers, who strip and plunge into the sea, may perchance reach the shore, but none else shall cheat the deep of its prey. Yet, when there is not another head among the billows—when the last survivor has climbed the beach—they muster; and soldiers, sailors, and prisoners—all are there. Paul got their lives, and not one has gone a-missing. **“Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship;”** but, by whatever way it came to pass, it did come to pass, as the narrative tells—**“they escaped all safe to land.”**

Even so shall it be with those of whom Jesus says, **“I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. My father that gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”** Happy those who sail in the ship, and have embarked in the same cause with Christ.

What they have committed to him, he will keep until the great day. And when all earthly schemes are foundered, and life itself becomes a wreck—plunging us amid the billows of eternity’s shore—and this old world itself is broken up like a worn out and stranded ship—then, at the last day’s muster, all who are Christ’s shall be there, not one of them shall be missing; sooner or later, all shall reach the heavenly coast.

“The Lord knoweth them that are his;” and “all that his Father hath given him he shall keep.”

But my text tells us not only that He will gather his people, but gather them **“out of all countries.”**

Let those mark that, who, indulging an extravagant patriotism, or in the narrow spirit of bigotry, allow themselves to **“limit the Holy One of Israel,”** and are ready to say with the Jews of old, **“We are the people of the Lord; the temple of the Lord are we,” “We have Abraham to our father.”** Alas! we are all too prone to think that we stand allied to Jesus in closer relationship than others, even as Benjamin to Joseph; others may be brothers, ours is a closer brotherhood; we are not only father’s but mother’s sons.

Now, we are patriotic enough to hope much for our country—for a land like ours, which has been crimsoned with precious blood, consecrated by prayers, and whose almost every mountain, as Rutherford said, “has been flowered with martyrs.”

We sympathize, also, with domestic affection; and the hope that families—so dear to us as our own—shall rise from the place of many graves to dwell together in the house of many mansions. Still, heaven, like the starry firmament which encompasses our globe, is as near other countries as our own.

God has people where we look not for them, and know not of them. A hundred prophets are secreted in Obadiah’s cave; and when Elijah, wrapped in his mantle, stands before the God of the storm and calm, and the **“still small voice,”** complaining, **“they have slain thy prophets, and I, even I only am left,”** he is surprised to be told of seven thousand in Israel, as true men as he, who have not bowed the knee to Baal. We may be astonished to miss some in heaven whom we calculated on meeting there, we shall be astonished to see some there whom we never expected.

The gospel belongs to no country, but to all. Every sea is not paved with pearl shells; nor does every soil grow vines and palms, nor does every mine sparkle with gems, nor do the streams of every land roll their waters over golden sands. These symbols of grace have a narrow range; but not grace herself. She owns no lines of latitude or longitude. All climates are one to her. She wears no party badge; and belongs neither to class nor color. She takes no objection to a Negro’s skin.

He, whom his white oppressor refused to worship with, eat with, sail with or dwell with on earth, shall dwell, and worship, and reign where his master may never be; and when—as may often happen—the white skin is shut out, and the black man, now and for ever free, passes in at the celestial gate, it shall furnish but another illustration of the truth, that salvation is, **“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”**

With this truth, as by a zone of love, elastic enough to be stretched round the globe, we would bind mankind together. Let it awaken in Christian hearts an interest and an affection for every land. Humanity rejoices with piety in the prospects that it opens. The distant natives of the Poles and Equator shall be associated in heaven; they who have never met on earth shall meet there; and they who never could agree on earth shall agree there; the desire of our hearts shall be accomplished there; and there those who, scowled at by bigots, and pitied by many as amiable visionaries, have sought a closer union among God’s children here, shall have their fondest wishes gratified. From the dreadful wars that now shake the earth, and the hardly less painful battlefields of churches, it is a pleasant change to contemplate this general assembly, where—Jesus himself presiding—the representatives of all nations, tribes, languages, sects, and parties, are met to sing the jubilee of universal peace, and celebrate the funeral of all their differences.

Over that grave no tears are shed; beside it no pale mourners stand; all quarrels and controversies, with their weapons of war, are now for ever buried—buried without fear of resurrection, and above it heaven rises, a temple dedicated to eternal concord, **“whose builder and maker is God.”**

Dishonored often in the present time by their quarrels, and always by their separation, Jesus shall then be glorified in all his saints. It is the dust and the rust which the liquid mercury has contracted that impair the beauty of its luster, and prevent the union of its divided globules. And what is it but earthly contaminations and unworthy passions that keep true Christians apart. From these let them be purified by the genial fires of love, or the sharp fires of suffering, and union will follow—follow as when the purified globules of quicksilver, brought into contact, run into each other’s embraces to form one shining and brilliant mass. May God give his divine Spirit of love and unity for such a blessed end—a consummation so devoutly to be wished for. The prophecy fulfilled which foretells such an union, then, the redeemed of the cross, and elect of God, shall make up a countless company, one which no man can number—multitudes and myriads—offering such a contrast to the handful who follow the steps of the Man of sorrows, that we shall hear these words no more—**“Ye are a little flock.”**

“He cometh, he cometh to judge the earth;” and how? after what manner? in what royal state? **“Behold he cometh with clouds”**—clouds, that on their nearer approach to earth, when the general mass shall resolve itself into individual objects, may be found to consist of innumerable hosts of winged and shining angels. On that great occasion, the saints—countless as the atoms that float in the vapors of the sky, or the drops that fall in its showers—shall also form, to use Paul’s expression, **“a cloud of witnesses.”** Already they form a cloud in heaven; and to the eye of faith it is as those nebulous spots, which, by their great distance, shine only with a faint luminosity far away in the depths of the starry firmament, but which, under the eye and instruments of the astronomer, are resolved into a countless aggregate of burning suns.

IV. We are assured that God will bring all his people to glory, by the fact that his own honor, as well as their welfare, is concerned in the matter.

In that lay the salvation of ancient Israel. **“How long will this people provoke me? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them; and I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.”** Thus spake the Lord to Moses, and how did he reply?

He had certainly a great temptation to make no reply and let things take their course, since the issue would bring him and his such great advantage. Type of the Saviour, he flung himself between justice and her culprits. He ventures to remonstrate with God. He sets himself to show, that the destruction of Israel—although, the just punishment of their sins—might militate against God’s declarative honor, and expose it to suspicion; and that, therefore, although he could not spare them for their sakes, he should spare them for his own. Moses was concerned for the fate of his countrymen. Like a true patriot, he declined to rise on their ruins; but more deeply concerned still for the honor of God, he takes courage to reply, **“Then the Egyptian shall hear it, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard of thee will speak, saying. Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he had slain them in the wilderness.”**

As it was then, so is it now. God’s honor, and truth, and covenant, are all concerned—are, so to speak, compromised to make good the promise, that he will bring his redeemed to glory. It is, indeed, no easy work to bring believers safe to glory. When I think of the sins to be forgiven, and the difficulties to be overcome, the wonder seems not that few get to heaven, but that any get there. We have read of voyages, where for nights the sailors enjoyed no sleep, and for days saw no sun. Lying at one time becalmed beneath a fiery sky, at another time shivering amid fields of ice; with sunken rocks around them, and treacherous currents sweeping them on dangerous reefs; exposed to sudden squalls, long, dark nights, and fearful tempests, the wonder was that their battered ship ever reached the port.

I select a case of recent occurrence.

Some while ago a vessel entered one of our western harbors, and the town poured out to see.

Well they might. It had left the American shore with a large, able-bodied crew. They have hardly lost sight of land when the pestilence boards them; victim falls after victim; another and another is committed to the deep, as from deck to deck, and yard to yard she pursues her prey; nor does she spread her wings to leave that ill-fated ship, till she has left but two to work it over the broad waters of a wintry sea.

And when, with Providence at the helm, these two men, worn by work and watching to ghastly skeletons, have brought their ship to land, and now kiss once more wives and little ones they never thought more to see, and step once more on a green earth they never more hoped to touch, men run to see the sight, and hear the adventures of a voyage brought against such dreadful odds to such a happy issue.

Yet there is never a bark drops anchor in heaven, nor a weary voyager steps out on its celestial strand, but is a still greater wonder. Save for the assurance that what God hath begun He will finish—that what concerns his people He will perfect—Oh, how often would our hope of final, blessedness altogether expire.

“Well might David say, **“I had fainted unless I had believed.”** And knowing what we know, and feeling what we feel, how entirely may we acquiesce in the old remark, that the greatest wonder we shall see in heaven, shall be to see ourselves there.

Yet let Christians take comfort. Your good and God’s glory ever run in the same direction. They are the parallel rails on which the chariot of salvation rolls. They shall bring you to the Jerusalem above. To compare small things with great, our journey there, with its dangers and changes, has sometimes appeared to me like that of a passenger to our own city.

On these iron roads he now travels along rich and fertile plains; now, at a dangerous and dizzy height he flies across intervening valleys; now he rushes through a narrow gorge cut in the solid rock, with nothing seen but heaven; now, boring into the earth, he dashes into some gaping cavern, for a while losing sight even of heaven itself, and then again he sweeps forth and on in sunshine, till at length the domes, and towers, and temples of the city burst on his view.

And, these close at hand, he concludes his journey by passing through an emblem of death. He enters a gloomy arch, advances in darkness through a place of graves, and then, of a sudden, emerges into day, to feast his eyes on the glorious scenery, and receive the congratulations of waiting friends, as he finds himself safe **“in the midst of the city.”**

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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