

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

Thomas Guthrie, D.D.

Copyright © 1862

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE SAINTS

And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen (Ezekiel 36:28-30).

A COUNTRY cleared of its inhabitants wears a mournful aspect. It may be that the emigrant has left poverty for plenty. Still it is not a pleasant thing to see nettles growing where the garden bloomed—the smoke-stained gable—the roofless ruin—the empty window, out of which the fox is peering, and where the morning sun was wont to shine upon the Bible and a pious patriarch.

There is something chilling about that cold hearthstone where the fire of a winter evening gleamed on the faces of a happy circle, while the mother plied her busy wheel, and, forgetful of the toils and dangers of the day, the shepherd handled a laughing infant on his knee. Those are now silent walls that once sounded to the evening psalm, and from which, when sabbath rested on the hills, a decent family went out, wending their way by the lakeside to that old ruin, beside whose crumbling walls the fathers of the exile sleep. The wind, as it sighed among the trees above that roofless home, has seemed in our fancy's ear to sound the prophet's lament, "**Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him, but keep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.**"

Such scenes, the pain of which, indeed, lies more in fancy than in fact, give us an image of the desolation which reigned in the kind of Judah during the time of the long captivity. By rule of contrast, they enhance also the pleasure with which we turn to look on this glowing picture—a land teeming with inhabitants, the rich plains studded all over with cities, each "busy as a beehive"—the valleys clothed with corn, crowded with reapers, and ringing to their song—every terrace in the close embrace of vines, and flocks bleating on a hundred hills. Such a scene, in fact, as surveyed from some eminence, awoke the piety and poetry of David—"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness; they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks, the alleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing."

The fulfillment of my text to God's ancient people would have invested this prophecy with interest, even although its application had been altogether confined to the Jews; and, for this reason—Their God is our God, and everything which he did for them is a most precious pledge of what he can and will do for us. "He is the dwellingplace of his people in all generations." Thus while faith turns her eye upon the future—a future often dark enough—she draws courage and comfort from the past, saying, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

But, in fact, we have more to do with this prophecy than the Jews had. Under those blessings which God poured into their cup—those temporal mercies which filled their mouths with most, and their hearts with gladness—lie the better mercies of Messiah's kingdom.

This shines plainly forth through the mystic language of the prophet. The conversion of the Gentiles is, for instance, distinctly announced in the 36th verse, "**Then the heathen, that are left round about you, shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that which was desolate. I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it.**"

In the succeeding chapter, again, the resurrection of the body and the renovation of the soul are set forth under the vision of dry bones. In the same place also have we not a kingdom shown forth more enduring far, than any which ever had its seat in Palestine? "**And David, my servant, shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd; they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them; and they shall dwell in the land which I have given to Jacob, my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children, for ever; and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.**"

It appears to us that this language cannot, without violence, be applied to the old Jewish land and people; and that the Roman ploughshare has buried such a fancy under the ruins of Jerusalem. With the blood of man's best brother on their heads, the Jews, like Cain, are vagabonds. They have no dwelling in the land which God gave to Jacob; for eighteen hundred years they have been wandering the world, nor have the soles of their feet yet found a resting place. A nation scattered and spoiled, they are a bye-word, a proverb, and a hissing—nor land, nor temple, nor oracle, nor prince, have they, nor shall have, till turning to the hope of his test and oldest fathers, the Jew bows his proud head to the Nazarene, and kisses the feet that were nailed to a cross.

Looking at these words, therefore, in this light—talking them in a Gospel, not a Jewish sense—let us give our attention to some of the blessings which they announce—the benefits which, to use the words of our Confession, "flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification."

Let the believer look—

I. To the abundance of the blessings of grace.

A new-born infant is the most helpless of all creatures. In its nakedness, weakness, dumbness, how dependent on a mother's love! Yet not more so than God's people are on his care and kindness.

Theirs are therefore circumstances in which his promises are exceedingly precious. The condition of believers very much resembles that of a man of boundless affluence, whose wealth lies, not so much in money, as in money's worth—in bills and bonds, that, when due, shall be duly honored. With these promises the poorest Christian is really a richer man than any other men, with all their possessions; nor would he part with one of them for the world's wealth.

This rude and naked savage—the dupe of avaricious men—barter a coronet of gold for some worthless trinkets, and buys the wonders of a mirror, the tinkling of a bell, or a string of colored beads, with a handful of pearls, the fit ornaments of a crown. The child of God knows better than to sell what is of surpassing value, for anything intrinsically worthless.

With this promise, **“thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure,”** he holds himself richer, more sure of meat to eat, and raiment to put on, than he would be with the wealth of banks. And why? Is this reasonable? No doubt of it. No logician ever reasoned more soundly. These may fail; God's promise cannot. The very stars shall drop like figs from shaken heavens, and these heavens themselves shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of what his God has spoken shall fail, till all be fulfilled.

With such security as we have in the character of God, and such fullness as is promised in the test, it needs, therefore, only a prophet's faith to echo a prophet's speech, and—when gaunt famine walks our streets, and there are **“clean teeth,”** and, children cry for bread, and their mothers have none to give them—to repeat the boldest words that ever fell from mortal lips—**“Although the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vine; though the labor of the olive should fail, and the fields yield no meat; though the flocks should be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.”**

I can fancy a skeptic exclaiming—Extravagance! fanaticism—mad fanaticism! No such thing.

In his promises God's people have meat to eat that others know not of, and these have proved like the breasts of a daughter to the aged captive who had been condemned to die of pining hunger. In that cell, where the gray old man each day took her infant's place, her love and ingenuity have found means to save a father's life, which his enemies never dreamt of; and the child of God, around whom fears of want are gathering, may rest assured, that he who inspired that daughter with the wit and will for such an emergency, will find ways and means to make his promise good. **“The word of the Lord is a tried word”**—fail us who, and what may, that cannot.

There are, indeed, times when the believer is ready to faint. Faith staggers beneath the burden, and hope all but expires. My sins are so many, my guilt so great, my burden so heavy! thus and thus they speak; now, with Jacob, complaining, **“All these things are against me”** and now, on finding Satan so often conquering them when they should have conquered him, crying with David, **“I shall one day fall by the hand of this Saul.”** Well, let your burdens, sins, cares, be such as you describe.

Let me ask you a question.

- Is it not as easy for yonder great sea to carry the bulkiest ship that ever rode her waves, as the seaweed or foam she flings upon the shore?
- Is it not as easy for that glorious sun to bathe a mountain, as to bathe a mole-hill in gold?
- Is it not as easy for this mighty earth to carry on its back an Alp as a grain of sand—to nourish a cedar of Lebanon, as the hyssop on the wall?

Just so, believer, it is as easy for God to supply thy greatest as thy smallest wants; even as it was as much within his power to form a system as an atom—to create a blazing sun, as kindle a firefly's lamp.

To one, indeed, whose standing point is on the ground, objects seem very various in their size. The cliffs tower above the level shore; piercing the horizontal cloud of smoke, the spires rise above the humbler tenements of the town; and from her throne of snow in high mid-summer, winter looks down on the valleys that He smiling at the mountain's feet. Eyed from the low, dead level of shore or plain, objects do appear in strong contrast, high or low, great or small, big or little. But I rise on eagle's wings; I sit on the circle of the earth; higher still, I stand beside the angel whom John saw in the sun; still higher, I follow Paul up to the third heavens; and, seen from such elevations—if seen at all—dwarf and giant, the mountain and the mole-hill, are on one level. All these sublunary differences vanish, sink into insignificance—into nothing.

Now, here lies a believer's comfort, and here shines a sinner's hope. So vanish all distinctions between great and little wants in the eye of God; so disappears all difference between great and little sins, or great and little sinners, to the blood of Christ; and, when our cares are cast on him who invites the burden, so sinks every difference between light and heavy burdens, to the back of Jesus.

It is as easy for Jesus Christ to save a Magdalene, a Manasseh, a hoary thief, as an infant, that (happy creature!) just leaves its mother's womb to make of this earth a stepping-stone to heaven,

Whatever be your circumstances, trials, cares, and griefs, this promise fits them—“**As thy day, so shall thy strength be.**”

Be he dwarf or giant, no man can say of an assurance so well founded, “**The bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself upon it; the covering is narrower than a man can wrap himself in it.**” Are you cast down because, while others have shallows, you have depths—dark depths—depths of sorrow, and suffering, to pass through? Be it so: it is as easy for God to march his people through the wide, deep sea as across the bed of Jordan. Are your corruptions strong? Be it so: Samson found it as easy to snap a new spun cable as withes fresh gathered on the river's bank; and believe me, it is as easy for God to break thy tyrant's strongest as his lightest chain.

A chain of iron and a thread of flax are all one to God. The blood of thy Saviour cleanseth from all sin; and nothing being impossible, nay not even difficult to Omnipotence, be assured, that in your battle, and watch, and work, you shall find this promise true—“**My grace is sufficient for thee.**”

II. *Consider the happiness which God's people enter on at death.*

Egypt pursued the Hebrews to the very shores of the sea. There, however, the people saw the last of them; of those tyrants who had made their burden so heavy and life so bitter, that their cry came up before the Lord. On this shore the oppressor and the oppressed are to part. In these weltering waves, from which they shrink back with dread—as some good men from death—their enemies and their griefs are to find a common grave.

In these the wicked shall cease from troubling; beyond them the weary shall be at rest. Night has come; a sun they shall never see more has set on Pharaoh and his host. Under the light that illumined the camp of God, and flung a fiery luster across the deep, Moses stood up to address the people. Their redemption was nigh. It was now just that darkest hour which ushers in the dawn. With his foot on the shore, his rod in his hand, the fiery pillar lighting up his face, Moses pointed to the gloom where the Egyptians lay, and said, **“The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.”**

God's people are like his ancient Israel. They have enemies who will harass them in life, and follow them to the very shores of time; but whoever, or whatever these may be—sin, sorrow, poverty, temptations, trials, fears, doubts, Satan himself—Oh! a deathbed shall be the death of them all. In leaving life we leave these behind. Death is their destruction, not ours. And how should it reconcile us to that dark passage from which nature shrinks, that when we stand in its gloomy mouth to take our last look of this world, may feel assured that we shall take the last look, not of friends in Christ—for we shall meet them again in heaven—but only of these our enemies.

We **“shall see them again no more for ever.”** Satan may not only pursue God's people to their very deathbed, but harass them upon it. He knows that his time is short. It is his last chance. Another day or hour, and they are out of his grasp; and so—summoning all the powers of hell—he drives down like the Egyptians into the sea—into the very depths of death—and aggravates by his horrible suggestions the struggles of a dying hour. The saint has, in that time of darkness, two enemies upon him—death, and him that has the power of death, that is the devil. Be it so; God shall take off their chariot wheels; they shall not reach the other shore, nor set foot in heaven; there, there entereth nothing to hurt or to defile.

The dead enter into rest.

- **“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, they rest.”**
- **“He that is dead is free from sin.”**

And, as I have looked on the calm and deep repose of the quiet sleeper, when the tossing arms lie still, and the restless head reposes on its pillow, and the features which have now lost all expression of pain, or passion, present an aspect of solemn, sublime, beautiful, perfect rest, I have sometimes thought that this was an emblem which the soul had left us of its own still more profound, perfect, heavenly rest.

This is what the redeemed escape from, but, Oh! what they escape to—the joys they enter on when they go to be with Christ, who can tell? We know that “**to die**” is—not shall be at some future time, and after some intermediate state—but “**to die is gain**,” gain immediate. One step—and, what a step!—the soul is in glory.

Ere the wail has sunk in the chamber of death, the song of the upper sanctuary has begun. There is no delay; no waiting for an escort to travel that invisible, untrodden way. Angels unseen are moving in that chamber, looking on with tearless eyes where all else are weeping; and, the last breath out—the last quiver passed from the lip—and away, away, they are off with the spirit for glory. On angel’s wings the beggar is borne to Abraham’s bosom; and the shout of saints and angels, that greeted the Conqueror, is still ringing amid the arches of heaven, when the door opens, and the thief walks in. “**This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.**” He leaves his cross, and direct, as I have seen a lark drop singing into her nest, he goes up singing to his crown.

And what and where is heaven? I cannot tell. Even to the eye of faith, heaven looks much like a star to the eye of flesh. Set there on the brow of night, it shines most bright—most beautiful; but it is separated from us by so great a distance as to be raised almost as high above our investigations as above the storms and clouds of earth.

A shining object, we see it gleaming in the fields of space, but we see nothing more, even when our eyes are assisted by the most powerful telescope. By what beings it is inhabited; what forms they have; what tongue they speak; what the character the landscape wears in these upper worlds we do not know; and perhaps never shall, till we have cast loose a body which moors us to the earth, and, with a soul unchained, free perhaps as thought—we are left to roam the universe, and pass, on the wings of wish, from world to world of our Father’s kingdom. Never, at least, till then, shall we know either where heaven is, or what heaven is. The best description of it is to say that it is indescribable.

Paul, on his return, attempted no other. There he “**heard and saw things unutterable.**” Nor does the matter cost us the least anxiety. If God spared not his own Son, heaven shall want nothing to make us supremely happy. It is enough for me to know that heaven, the home of the blessed—the palace of the Great King—has joys which eye never saw, ear never heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

III. The complete blessedness of the saints at the resurrection in the restoration of all that sin forfeited.

There were periods in creation—progressive steps. Step by step the work advanced to its consummation. In creation, just as in conversion, the process began with light—letting light in upon the darkness. God said, “**Let there be light, and there was light, and the evening and the morning were the first day.**” And then a wide-spread firmament of blue separates the waters above the earth from the waters beneath, and, the work completed, the evening and the morning are the second day. The third day begins a new epoch. The mountains raise their heads above the waters; like an infant, the earth comes naked from the womb, and when God has wrapped the new-born world in a beautiful robe of flowers, green fields, and waving forests, the evening and the morning are the third day.

The heavens next are garnished; and when their boundless fields are sown with countless stars, the evening and the morning are the fourth day. Thus the Creator goes on with his work. Each succeeding period brings it nearer to perfection, till, on the evening of the sixth day, as the sun was sinking behind the western hills, his slanting beams shone on our holy, happy parents—their home a garden, their estate a world, the creatures all their servants, in their hearts no taint of sin, in their eyes no tear of sorrow, and on brows too soon to be bathed in sweat, and blushing with shame, flashing crowns of innocence. Then, from the throne of his most excellent majesty, God looked on this world as it rolled away in its happy orbit, and, pronouncing aill that he had made to be very good, the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Like creation, the Gospel has had its periods of progress.

It gradually advanced in its development from the first promise given by God, when he, the judge, and the culprits man and the devil stood face to face upon the ruins of Eden.

First, we have a simple altar, with the smoke of sacrifice curling up to heaven from earth's unbroken forests—none there but our two solitary parents, weeping, as well they might, when they gazed on the miserable wreck which they had made of their own and their children's fortunes; and yet, while they wept, lifting up their heads in hope of a coming redemption.

The scene shifts, and next we have a desert, with a mighty host scattered over its sands, and in their midst a tented sanctuary with a cloud of incense floating, like a prayer, away to heaven.

The scene shifts again, and Jerusalem sits upon her hills, and where hundreds of white-robed priests are serving, and thousands of worshipers are kneeling, a magnificent temple of marble, cedar, and gold towers high over all—the ornament and palladium of the land.

The scene shifts once more. It is mid-day, and yet dark; the earth is trembling, graves are yawning to let out their dead, and, through the gloom of an unnatural eclipse, we behold the cross of Calvary with its bleeding victim. Son of God! He is dying, **“the just for the unjust.”** He cries, **“It is finished,”** and, as Saviour of the world, he dies. The work, so long ago begun, is brought to a triumphant close. In the very act of death he swallows up death in victory. And thus you see how, from one garden to another, from the flowery bowers of Eden to the olives of Gethsemane, from the first promise to the final performance, redemption advances by successive steps. Jesus bows his head; and then, again, from the throne of his most excellent majesty, God looks on all the work, and over the bloody cross and his own dead Son, pronounces this judgment,. **“Behold, it is very good.”** And, ushering in an eternal Sabbath, the evening and the morning were the sixth day of redemption.

There yet remains an aspect of redemption in which it is not complete.

The prince of this world is still out, and in the battlefield fighting—fighting like the devil he is for his kingdom. The body yet lies a captive in the tomb, and the grave must yield its ancient charge. Insatiate and insatiable devoured thou robber of our pleasant homes!

With thy black mouth ever opening, and thy cry, give, give, give, ever in our ear, thou thyself must give—thou must give up thy dead. The dust of saints is dear to Christ. He comes to claim it. All that death and Satan hold they must relinquish; all that Christ has purchased he shall possess. The soul wants her partner; and although the exile may return no more, nor see his native land, the redeemed shall return to claim their bodies from the earth—aye, and claim the very earth they lie in. **“The saints shall inherit the earth.”**

A grand destiny awaits this world of sins and sorrows. This earth, purified by judgment fires, shall be the home of the blessed. The curse of briars and thorns shall pass away with sin

“Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree.”

Of the thorns of that curse Jesus’ crown was woven, and he bore it off upon his head. Under laws accommodated to the new economy, the wide world shall become one Eden, where, exempt from physical as from moral evils, none shall shiver amid arctic frosts, nor wither under tropic heat; these fields of snow and arid sands shall blossom all with roses.

From the convulsions of expiring—or rather the birth-pangs of parturient nature—a new-born world shall come, a home worthy of immortals, a palace befitting its King. The blood that on Calvary dyed earth’s soil shall bless it, and this theater of Satan’s triumph, and of a Saviour’s shame, shall be the seat of Jesus’ kingdom, and the witness of his glory.

Then the saints shall inherit the earth.

Some, like Abraham in the Promised Land, are poor wanderers here—the proprietors of nothing but a grave. Some own not even so much as that. The saints, like the descendants of a noble but decayed house, are strangers on the soil which was once the property of their fathers. But the time of their redemption draweth nigh.

Man shall get his own again, and hold it by a charter written in the blood of Christ. This world was gifted to him. It was his patrimonial estate. It was the land given to our fathers. And it seems most meet, that with the rank and title, the lands should come back to the old family; and, as forming the completest triumph over Sin and Satan, that our redemption should be altogether like that of Israel, when Moses turned round on Pharaoh, saying, **“Not a hoof shall be left behind.”**

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.”

~ end of chapter 21 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
