

Gracious Dealings and Perverse Requitals

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"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."
Isaiah 63:9, 10

This chapter opens in a very remarkable manner. A glorious Personage is seen advancing as from a distance upon the scene, who bears himself with noble carriage, and moves onward in princely majesty. To bring the whole scene more vividly before our eyes, the Church is represented as struck with astonishment at his stately appearance, and asking as if aloud, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength."

This glorious Personage, then, is represented as "coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah. Edom, or as it is sometimes called Idumea, lay to the south of Judea, and was inhabited by the descendants of Esau. These being inveterate foes to the children of Judah, became types of the enemies of the Church. Bozrah was a large city in the land of Edom, and therefore typical of the chief seat of the Church's enemies. This mighty Man of war, therefore, is represented as coming from the chief seat of the Church's foes, and with dyed garments from their most important city.

He is also "glorious in his apparel," as becomes a conquering King; and appears "travelling," or, as the word properly

means, "bending back his head," as if towering aloft, "in the greatness of his strength."

As, then, the Church asks the question, "Who," and what he is, this glorious Personage condescends to answer her inquiry. "I"—Oh that glorious "I!" what volumes are contained in it! for it indicates that the speaker is no less than the great and glorious "I AM"—"I that *speak in righteousness.*" Is not that, too, a proof of who and what he is? For who speaks in righteousness but he, every one of whose words is true, and whose voice is the voice of authority and power? But he adds another description of himself, which at once reveals who he is, in words that seem to thrill through the very soul, "*Mighty to save.*" How can we then doubt that Jesus is here? Who but he could take such language into his lips?

But, as if emboldened by his gracious answer, the Church asks him another question, for she observed that he was clothed in "dyed garments." "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine vat?" She could not exactly understand why he came before her in these garments so richly stained, so deeply dyed, as if, according to the custom in the East, he had been treading grapes in the wine vat, and had become sprinkled all over with their ruddy juice. But in the same princely majesty and with the same condescending kindness as that in which he had answered her previous question, he replies, "I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them," so it reads in our version, but it should have been rendered in the past tense, *I have trodden* them in my anger, and trampled them in my fury; and their blood has been sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment." "For," he adds, "the day of vengeance was in mine heart, and the year of my

redeemed was come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me."

But now the question arises in the mind, to what part of the Redeemer's work and office does this princely appearance refer? What is mystically and spiritually intended by his appearing to the Church in garments dyed with blood? Does it mean, as I believe most of the commentators interpret it, his first appearance in the flesh, when he bare our sins in his own body on the tree; when he was bathed with bloody sweat in Gethsemane's garden, and when his sacred body was mystically and spiritually, if not actually, drenched in blood as he hung upon the cross? Or has it a reference to his second coming, when he will execute vengeance upon his enemies, and though not literally, yet in a mystical sense, will stain his raiment with their blood? According to the strict connection of the passage, I should say that the latter is the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost; but I think that, without doing violence to the whole bearing of the chapter, we may well believe that the blessed Spirit has brought before the Church of God here the two appearances of the Lord, not to the exclusion of one, but to the inclusion of both. The Holy Spirit often connects events which, separated by distance of time, are still intimately connected in themselves; as, for instance, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Lord's second coming. (Matt. 24.) So he connects in this chapter the coming of the Lord to save and the coming of the Lord to judge, for in each is the salvation of the Church. Thus his very first words in describing himself as "speaking in righteousness" fitly point to our Lord's first coming as God's anointed Prophet; and surely, as a suffering and sacrificing High Priest, he is "mighty to save," and therefore is fitly dressed in garments dyed in blood—his own blood that he

shed upon the cross. But our Lord's first appearance in grace opened a way for his second coming in glory. We find, therefore, the Scripture ever representing that at his appearing the second time he will not only come, "without sin, unto the salvation" of his friends, but also to the destruction of his enemies. Thus we find the apostle speaking, "And to you who are troubled rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe." (2 Thess. 1:7, 8, 10.) You will observe also that the reason of the connection of the first and second coming of the Lord rests upon this, that each part of the Lord's work, first, in redemption, when he died upon the cross, and secondly, in manifestation, when he comes a second time without sin unto salvation, was equally a deliverance of the Church: first, by blood, secondly, by power; first, to put away her sins by the sacrifice of himself when he died upon the cross, and thus save her in soul; and secondly, by his second coming, to raise up the sleeping dust, and thus save her in body. The Holy Spirit has therefore connected the two appearings of the Son of God, and here presents him before our eyes both as our suffering High Priest and as our victorious King.

The Church, then, having received this gracious explanation from the Lord's lips, feels encouraged to recount his mercies: "I will mention the loving kindness of the Lord, and the praise of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving kindness." She gives then a reason why the Lord has shown such mercy and loving kindness toward the house of Israel: "For he said,

Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour." Then follow the words of the text, in which, without further introduction, we may observe, I think, four distinct points, which I shall, with God's help and blessing, lay before you this morning.

I.—*First*, the *gracious dealings* of the Lord with his people; of which you will find, if I mistake not, four distinct instances here brought forward:—1. *Participation*: "In all their affliction he was afflicted." 2. *Redemption*: "In love and in his pity he redeemed them." 3. *Salvation*: "And the angel of his presence saved them." 4. *Support*: "He bare them and carried them all the days of old."

II.—*Secondly*, you will observe the *perverse requitals* which this people, so highly favoured, rendered to the Lord: "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit."

III.—*Thirdly*, what was the *consequence* of their base requitals in rebelling and vexing his holy Spirit: that "he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

IV.—*Fourthly*, which is not in the text, but may be gathered up from the preceding verse—The Lord's *gracious return*: "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour."

I.—"*In all their affliction he was afflicted.*" These words at once carry our thoughts to our blessed Lord as bearing a part in all the afflictions of his Church and people; for the words are not only very expressive in force, but very comprehensive in meaning. "In all their affliction he was afflicted." Take these words as they stand. Give them their fullest import; and shall we dare to limit them? Should we not, in so doing, "limit the Holy One of Israel?" But take them

as they stand in all the strength and fulness of their meaning, and you cannot find a single affliction which the Church of God ever has endured or ever will endure which is not embraced in their comprehensive arms. If ever then by diligent searching you can put your finger upon any one affliction of the saints of God in which the Lord was not afflicted, you must take that word "all" out of the text and put "some," or "many," in its place. We will then take the words in the fulness of their strength, and examine how "in all the affliction" of his people the Lord "was afflicted." And I think we may lay it down as certain from the Scriptures of truth that he was afflicted in all their affliction in two distinct ways: first, by actual *participation*; secondly, by sensible *sympathy*. Let us look at both of these points separately.

i. First, then, our gracious Lord shared in the afflictions of his people by *actual participation* of them. The positive declaration, "in all their affliction he was afflicted," would not have been true, or only partially so, unless the Lord, the same Lord who came with dyed garments from Edom, were, by suffering, an actual partaker of their afflictions. But do you not see how this involves the necessity of an incarnate God, that is, God manifest in the flesh? for in order that the Lord might be a partaker of all the afflictions of Zion, he must take upon himself a nature which could suffer affliction. God cannot be afflicted; Deity cannot suffer; sorrow cannot intertwine itself around the divine Essence of him who inhabiteth eternity. If, then, our blessed Lord was to be afflicted in, and with all the afflictions of his people, he must assume a nature which could be afflicted, and yet be in the closest and most intimate union with his Deity, so that his Person might be one. In our blessed Lord it was not *two Persons*, two distinct Persons, of which one suffered and the other did not suffer, but two natures in one Person. Two Persons would have made our Lord to be two distinct

individuals. It was then in his human nature that the Lord suffered.

But let us examine this point a little more closely, for it is full of vital and blessed truth; and we shall see that there were several circumstances which made our Lord not only to partake of the afflictions of his people, but added in a peculiar way to the intensity of his sufferings under them.

1. Affliction is always rendered more painful *by contrast*. A poor man does not feel poverty as a rich man would feel it, if he were suddenly brought into precisely the same circumstances. The dress, lodging, fare, hard work, and scanty wages, a life of toil, sickness and old age without any but the meanest parish provision—such every-day experience of the poor would kill the rich in the first days of their apprenticeship. An invalid confined for many years to a sick couch does not feel illness as a strong man feels it when in the heyday of youth and health he is laid, by a sudden stroke, upon the bed of affliction. We may then certainly assume that contrast adds very much to the weight of affliction. Now apply this to our blessed Lord before he came to do the will of God, and view him by the eye of faith in the courts of bliss, enjoying the sweetest communion with his heavenly Father, in whose bosom as his eternal Son he ever lay, and with the Holy Ghost, with whom, as a Person in the sacred Trinity, he is one in the Unity of the Divine Essence. See him as daily his Father's delight, rejoicing always before him (Prov. 8:30); as ever worshipped by adoring angels, and filling heaven with his beauty and glory. Now view him as assuming our nature into union with his own divine Person, and see the contrast. What an exchange! The bosom of the Father for the manger of Bethlehem; the worship of angels for the lowing of oxen; the enjoyment of the glories of heaven for companionship with the infirmities—sinless, we

know, but still the weaknesses incident to a suffering humanity. Still follow him with the eye of faith through every phase and circumstance of suffering, till you see the bloody sweat of Gethsemane and the agonies of Calvary, and trace in each and all the contrast which so deepened and intensified the woe. The Father's smile, the Father's frown; the Father's love, the Father's anger; the rivers of joy above, the floods of wrath below; once heaven, now hell; the glory with the Father before the world was, the darkened sky, the heaving earth, the racked body, the tortured soul. Who but he could so have suffered? Who but he so endured? Who but he by suffering so perfected?

2. But consider as another reason why the blessed Lord not only in all the affliction of his people was afflicted, but more so than any of them could possibly be, that his pure and holy humanity was of an organisation which peculiarly felt suffering. We see this in nature. Persons of very tender frames and naturally delicate organisation, whose bodies or minds, nerves or feelings, are more than usually acute and sensitive, feel suffering much more poignantly and deeply than those whose sensibilities are naturally coarser and blunter, and as it were constitutionally tempered for rougher and harder work. Grievs and troubles under which one person would sink, another will endure with the greatest equanimity. The very sight of the knife will almost kill one patient, when another will bear the cutting off of his leg without a groan. It is better for some that their natural feelings should not be too sensitive: that their mental fibre should not be of too fine a grain.

But look at our blessed Lord in this point of view: His body and soul were perfectly holy; nor was his pure humanity framed by natural generation, but by the immediate operation and supernatural overshadowing of the Holy Ghost.

Our bodies and souls are blunted and hardened by original sin. Our minds are coarse, our bodies of clay; rough is the mould, gross the material; earthen the pitcher, vile the contents. But pure was that "holy thing," that sacred humanity conceived in the womb of Mary; therefore we may justly believe of the tenderest and most exquisite sensibility to suffering. I cannot enlarge; I merely throw out the hint; but if you will view the Lord as "bruised" and "put to grief," and see his tender heart suffering in proportion to the exquisite sensibility of his sacred body and holy soul, you will have some matter of contemplation when you think of his afflictions and temptations.

3. But now look at our Lord's afflictions under another point of view; consider their *universality*. Taking the words of our text in their fullest extent, and with one exception which I shall presently mention, we may safely say that there is not an affliction which his people can suffer of which he had not an intimate personal experience. Is *poverty* an affliction? Who so poor as he who could say, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head?" (Matt. 8:20.) Is it open *scorn* or secret *contempt*? Who so contemned as he who was despised and rejected of men (Isa. 53:3), and who could say, "But I am a worm, and not man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people?" Is it *treachery*? Who so betrayed as he, by one of his own disciples, and that by a traitor's kiss? Is it *hunger* or *thirst* or *nakedness*? Our Lord suffered all three. He hungered in the wilderness; thirsted by Samaria's well; was stripped of his clothing when he hung upon the cross. Or is it *spiritual* affliction, which of all is the severest? How the law discharged all its curses into his breast! How he endured its severest penalty when he was made a curse for us, and hung as a criminal upon the tree! Is the *wrath* of God in itself a very hell? Has it internally if not externally crucified

thousands of the afflicted saints of the Most High? Is one drop of the wrath of God falling, so to speak, in a sinner's cup so bitter that he can scarcely live under it? But what is that one drop to the whole cup of God's wrath poured out full of mixture, which our blessed Lord drank to the very dregs? Does affliction consist in the *hiding of God's face*? Who endured that like our blessed Lord in that solemn hour when, as if appalled by the sight of its suffering Creator, the sun veiled his face, earth heaved and rocked to her centre, and the very dead came out of their graves, as if they had heard the same voice which called up Lazarus now crying aloud in dolorous accents, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Does affliction consist in the *temptations of Satan*? Who, though "harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," suffered as the gracious Lord did from the temptations of Satan in the lonely wilderness, when faint with hunger after forty days' fast? Was he not "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?" (Heb. 4:15.) So take the whole range of afflictions which may befall a child of God, and cause him trouble and sorrow, and still our text is true: "In all their affliction he was afflicted."

ii. But our gracious Lord endured affliction not only by participation, but by *sympathy*. I have already hinted that I should have to name one exception to our Lord's enduring personally every kind of affliction. There was one peculiar affliction that he could not suffer: I mean bodily sickness, which is a large portion of the cup of sorrow drunk by many choice saints of God. His holy body could and did suffer pain, and that to an exquisite degree, but was not capable of sickness, for that springs from mortality and disease, neither of which infected the sacred humanity of Jesus; but he bore our sickness by sympathy, by imputation. This is clearly and beautifully expressed by the evangelist: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (Matt. 8:17.)

Sympathy, we know, when the feelings are very tender, the tie close, and the affections strong, enables us to feel the afflictions of others almost as much as, and in some cases perhaps, more than our own; for they may feel a support under them with which we may not be favoured. The sufferings of those who are near and dear to us touch our heart; their sorrows melt our feelings; so that we experimentally know that we can feel affliction by sympathy when we feel it not by actual participation. You are a warm-hearted, tender mother; you have an only child, a dear little boy, suddenly seized with croup; and there he lies gasping for breath, and dying by inches on your lap. What anguish rends your heart as you see his dear little face blacked and distorted, and hear that peculiar cry which has already been the death knell of your other children! But *you* are not personally suffering; there is no croup in *your* throat. *You* are not gasping for breath as if every one were your last, and as if you could burst through windows and walls to get one draught of pure air. But O what heart-breaking work to witness all this in the dear child! Thus, there is suffering by sympathy, which may be as intense as suffering by participation. And is not sympathy proportionate to love? Little love, little sympathy; much love, much sympathy. Is it not also proportionate to tenderness of feeling? Hard, unfeeling hearts, coarse, brutal natures do not, cannot sympathise with human suffering. Is it not also proportionate to nearness of tie, propinquity of blood or oneness of heart? Look at this in our blessed Lord. Who so full of love; who so tender in pity; who so near to his people by participation of the same flesh and blood, and by oneness of the same Spirit? What tender sympathy melted his heart! How he wept at the tomb of Lazarus! What pity he felt for the widow at Nain, when he saw her only son borne upon the bier! How he compassionated the suffering multitude in the wilderness when they had been three days and had nothing to eat.

(Matt. 15:32.) How he dropped the sympathising tear over Jerusalem: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." (Luke 19:42.)

1. And observe some peculiar features of the Lord's sympathy. As existing in our bosom, sympathy is a very mixed feeling. Sin has not only blunted our sensibilities, but, by its poison, infused into us that almost fiendish feeling which a keen observer of human nature so satirically describes when he says that "in the calamities of our friends there is something which does not altogether displease us;" in other words, to speak more bluntly, there is even sometimes a malignant pleasure in the heart of man in seeing others suffer. Why? Because selfishness secretly whispers, "What a good thing it is that it is not *you!*" Thus sin has given us the malice of a fiend when we should have the pity of an angel. But the sympathy of our blessed Lord was *holy*, for he was holy; *pure*, for he was pure; *perfect*, for he was perfect.

2. Again, we may sympathise with the afflictions of the people of God, but our sympathy is *variable* in time, measure, and degree. Indeed, from the very constitution of our minds and bodies, we could not bear the strain of sympathy long, nor to a very intense degree. The weak cord would snap if drawn too tight, or kept at full stretch too long. But our Lord's sympathy with his afflicted people is, like himself, "without the shadow of a turn."

3. Again, we may sympathise with a few individuals of the Lord's family personally known to and loved by us; but our gracious Lord sympathises with *all* his Church; with the widow dropping her tears over her departed husband; with the "tears of such as are oppressed and who have no

comforter;" with the tempted saint under the fiery darts of Satan; with the condemned sinner under a broken law; with those who are suffering under the hidings of God's countenance; in a word, with all his afflicted followers who, through much tribulation, are entering into the kingdom of God. Is it not then true that the Lord's present sympathy is as universal as his past participation?

But what a view this universality and depth of sympathy gives us into the very heart of Christ! How it takes the veil, so to speak, off his gracious bosom and lets us look at his heart within, as his heart without might have been seen beating through his ribs when he hung upon the cross, all stripped and bare, a spectacle to men and angels!

ii. But I now pass on to another gracious dealing of the Lord with his people, which I have named under the head *"Redemption:" "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them."*

The sympathy of our Lord with his afflicted people was not, as too often is our case, barren, inoperative, inefficacious. You may often sympathise, and that very deeply, with the afflicted, but be utterly unable to give them the least relief. The poor mother whose case I was just now picturing, with a child dying on her lap of croup, can sympathise deeply with the dear sufferer, but cannot relieve it. You may sit by the widow's couch, see the big tears drop, and hear her deep-drawn sighs over her departed husband, but you cannot give him back to her arms. You may visit a beloved friend on a sick bed, and deeply feel for him as you see the cold drops of death standing upon his forehead, and would gladly snatch him from the grave; but you are as powerless as he is in the presence of the last enemy. But it was not so with the gracious Lord. He had power as well as pity; strength as well

as love; and it was love and pity in his heart, blended with power in his hands, which made him "mighty to save," invested him with the character and gave him the qualifications of a Redeemer. Look, then, at these two qualifications of a Redeemer—love and pity as unfolded in our text, and see how beautifully and blessedly they were blended in our gracious Lord, as the Redeemer of Israel.

1. Look at *love* first. We cannot understand, except in very small measure, what the love of God is. The apostle therefore prays for the Ephesian believers, that they may be "able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The word "comprehend" there, I must remark, does not mean to "understand" so much as to "apprehend," that is, "embrace," for this love may be apprehended, but it cannot be comprehended; it may be believed in, but it cannot be understood; it may be felt, but cannot be explained; embraced, but not described. Do we not read that it "passeth knowledge?" When, therefore, we speak of the love of Christ, we cannot look into the depths of his eternal love, as ever dwelling in the bosom of the Redeemer, as we might gaze down to the very bottom of a clear brook; but we seem rather to stand on the brink of a mighty river, or of an unfathomable ocean. In fact, we are lost when we seek to grasp it with our finite faculties.

But when we consider man in his fallen state, we are more amazed still at this stupendous love. What was there in man to love, especially as we view him sunk into, and involved in the horrid depths of the fall? View him even apart from the fall. In Paradise, as he came forth from the creating hand of the Almighty, and ask yourself what was there in him to love, even as he stood in all the innocence of his pure humanity? Nothing, absolutely nothing, when we compare him with his

divine Maker. God saw the work of his hands that it was "very good." But it might draw out his approbation, and still not demand or deserve his love. But as sinlessness could not deserve, so sinfulness could not hinder, the flow of love. Love sought and made its own channel. Look at a noble river—the Rhine or the Rhone. It gushes forth from the mountain side unasked for by any, but it finds or makes its own channel; and as it flows it fertilises every land to which it comes. Fertile lands do not make the river flow to them by force of some innate attraction, but the river makes them fertile, especially in eastern countries, by flowing to and over them. What would Egypt be without the Nile? A desert. But do its rich fields draw the annual inundation, or does the annual inundation make the fields rich? So it is with the love of God in Christ to fallen man. The love of God was not drawn forth by the goodness, nor repelled by the badness of man; nor did it ask whom it should visit, as if it sought the consent or cooperation of the creature. Sovereignty and freeness are most unmistakeably both stamped upon it; for it flowed in his origin as freely forth, as the river which John saw in vision, "clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1.) O what love! how "strong as death!" O the heights and depths, lengths and breadths of that love, of which our Lord himself said: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." (John 15:9.) And again, in those wondrous words before which we seem to stand as if mute with holy astonishment: "And hast loved them as thou hast loved me." (John 17:23.)

2. But, besides this love, as especially manifested in the work of redemption, there was "*pity*," which gave to it a peculiar tenderness, and made it, if possible, still more suitable to man's fallen state. God loves angels, but he does not pity them. As ever standing in the presence of God, and always beholding his face (Luke 1:19; Matt. 18:10), they need no

compassion from his gracious bosom, for they ever live in the sunshine of his favour. God loves glorified souls, "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), but he does not pity them, for they are in the enjoyment of heavenly bliss. But he pities poor fallen man; for man is in a very pitiable condition. Sin has laid him low, very low, defaced the image of God, in which he was created, and filled him with every vile and loathsome abomination. This naturally loathsome condition of man is beautifully represented in Ezekiel 16, where the Church is brought before our eyes under the figure of a newborn babe, abandoned by its unnatural mother, and "cast out in the open field to the loathing of its person in the day that it was born." "None eye," we read, "pitied thee to have compassion on thee." The babe did not know its own pitiable state, nor see or feel its own loathsome condition, as it lay polluted in its own blood; but the Lord saw and pitied, for "he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11), and "his compassions fail not." (Lam. 3:22.)

But our text says, "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them;" representing the union of love and pity in the bosom of the Redeemer. Thus love and pity seem to resemble two pure streams, which, gushing out of the Redeemer's bosom, met together in one full river, and flowed down to Paradise, there to swell in a superabounding tide of grace over man's sin, and to be revealed in the first promise given after the fall to our first parents. Did not love and pity similarly meet over the outcast babe? "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love." (Ezek. 16:8.) And bear in mind this love and pity are not like ours—mingled with infirmity, subject to interruption, often partial, and sometimes mistaken. It was pure love, it was pure pity, which flowed from the heart of the Redeemer, unmingled with the least infirmity; as wise as it was strong, as unerring as it was holy. It was *Godlike*: "I am God and not man"

(Hosea 11:9); and *infinite*, for, like every other divine attribute, it shares in all the perfections of Deity. It was therefore love as infinite as God could feel, and pity as great as could fill the bosom of the glorious "I AM." This love was therefore so vast as to embrace all the Church of God, and this pity so great as to reach down to every member of the mystical body of Christ, as seen sunk in the Adam fall into the lowest depths of sin and misery. But were this love and pity in the heart of Christ mere *feelings*? They manifested themselves in *acts*, as the Lord represents himself, in the case of the outcast babe, stooping to perform for it the tenderest yet lowest offices. Our love and pity often lead to nothing; they begin and end in *feelings*, or evaporate in the mere mockery of words, like James's self-sparing almoners, with their, "Be ye warmed and filled." (James 2:16.) But the Lord's love and pity led to acts, and especially to that mighty act of *redemption*: "In his love and pity he redeemed them." This brings us to the work of redemption.

But what is *redemption*? What does it imply? In these great truths it is good to catch the leading idea which runs through the whole doctrine—the key note which dominates the whole air. The leading idea, then, of redemption is this, that those who need to be redeemed are in a state of slavery from which they cannot free themselves. A redeemer, then, is one who can set them free either by price or by power. As a Redeemer, Jesus did both. He bought his people with a price, and delivered them by his power. By the Adam fall we became bond slaves to sin. An Israelite might sell himself to a stranger, though not to one of his own brethren. (Lev. 25:47.) So Ahab is said to have "sold himself to work wickedness." (1 Kings 21:20, 25.) In this sense, Adam, our head and representative, when perfectly free, sold himself to do evil, and as we were then in his loins, he being our federal head, sold us also into captivity. But in the law of Moses,

provision was made for an Israelite who had sold himself. One of his brethren, or any nigh of kin might redeem him. This points to the Goel or Redeemer, the next of kin, and to the price which was to be paid, that the slave might go free, called "the price of redemption." (Lev. 25:51.) This price could not be small, whether we consider how many had to be redeemed, or the awful depths of sin and misery from which they had to be released. Nor could man do anything himself to pay the debt. For the Israelite who sold himself might also redeem himself, "if he were able." (Lev. 25:49.) Ah! if he were able; but we are not able. How deep the debt none can tell except those who in some measure have felt the burden of sin. But though these may seem to see and feel a little of the mighty debt, even they have very dim apprehensions of what the debt is in all its awful magnitude; for as debtors in those days, if they could not themselves pay them, were sold to pay their debts, as we find exemplified in the parable of the servant who owed his lord ten thousand talents, the idea of the payment of a debt became included in the term redemption. Thus viewed, God is the creditor; the Law is his demand of the debt; and eternal death the penalty of non-payment. View, then, the debt in all its vastness: the horrid crimes, the dreadful sins, the aggravated iniquities of the whole body of the elect, all which as so many huge claims demanded by indignant Justice, were to be paid for, or the debtors could not go free.

But debt and payment must bear some mutual proportion, be what is called "commensurate," for a little sum cannot pay a large debt. Now nothing shows us the vastness of the debt incurred by the Church so much as the greatness of the price paid to redeem it; for if debt and payment must be commensurate, then the greater the sum paid the vaster the debt. "Ye are bought with a price;" for redemption not only pays the debt, but makes the redeemed the property of the

Redeemer. But what was the price? Nothing less than the atoning blood of the Son of God, and therefore having all the virtue and validity of Deity stamped upon it; for he who shed it was God as well as man. Thus, though it was the blood of the Lord's pure humanity, yet all the validity of Deity was in it, for as the Lord had but one Person, though two natures, the blood-shedding was one, the sacrifice one, the merit one, for the Person was one; and thus, though Christ suffered as man, he merited as God. This made the blood of the Lamb an efficacious price, for it derived its value from the Deity of the Person who gave it, and freely, voluntarily shed it, as a propitiation for sin. Thus it is the payment of a debt which God will never require again; and the entire removal of a curse which will never fall upon the head of the redeemed from among men. It is a full and final discharge of all law charges and all demands of justice. O what redemption! God devised it; his dear Son executed it; the Holy Ghost applies it. Blessed scheme; blessed execution; blessed application.

iii. But we now come to another gracious dealing—*Salvation*. I have rather inverted the exact order of the words of the text, because redemption, as a work and in the economy of grace, comes before salvation. "*The angel of his presence saved them.*" The Son of God, as coming forth from his Father's presence to redeem and save the Church, is called here the Angel of his presence." The word "Angel" does not always mean a created angel—one of those bright and glorious beings who stand before the eternal throne. In Revelation, for instance, the pastor of a church is called "the angel" of that church, as, "Unto the angel of the church at Smyrna write." (Rev. 2:8.) The word translated, "angel," means literally, both in Greek and Hebrew, "messenger." Thus our blessed Lord is called by Malachi, "the messenger of the Covenant" (Mal. 3:1), the word translated "messenger" there being just the same as is rendered elsewhere "angel,"

as "Mine Angel shall go before thee." (Exod. 32:34.) But in our text the blessed Lord is called "the Angel of God's presence," or of his "face," as the word literally means. I understand by the expression mainly four things:—1. That the Lord Jesus Christ, as his eternal Son, *was ever* in God's presence; 2, That as the "Angel," or "messenger of the Covenant," *he came forth from* God's presence; 3, That he *introduces* his people *into* God's presence; 4, That he *reveals* and manifests to them the Father's *sensible* presence. But let me open these points a little more fully and distinctly.

1. First, then, our blessed Lord, as the eternal Son of God, was, from all eternity, in the presence of God as no created angels could be. **Angel, as pure Intelligences [or perhaps, Angels, as pure intelligences...]** see God's face as a gracious favour; but they do not behold it from all eternity, nor by inherent right, as does the Son of God who ever lay in his bosom.

2. From that presence he came as "the Angel of the Covenant." "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world." (John 16:28.) "These have known that thou hast sent me." (John 17:2.5.) He is "the Angel of God's face," as Jacob said of the man with whom he wrestled, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30); for as his eternal Son, he is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person. Thus, "he that hath seen him, hath seen the Father;" for "he and the Father are one." (John 10:30-14:9.) He is "the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4), and "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Col. 2:9.)

3. But the Lord Jesus is also "the Angel of God's presence," as introducing redeemed sinners into his presence. None can come into God's presence except through the angel of his presence—the God-man mediator; for "through him," (and

through him alone), "we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 2:18.) In the ancient Persian Court, as we find from the book of Esther (1:14), only a very few persons, as "the seven princes of Persia and Media, who sat the first in the kingdom," were allowed to see the face of the King. The privilege was almost as much restricted in the Jewish court, which made Absalom say, "Now, therefore, let me see the king's face, and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me," as if he could not live without it. (2 Sam. 14:32.) Even in our Court, none can come into the presence of the Queen unless specially introduced. So, spiritually, none can see the face of God except introduced into his presence by his dear Son.

4. And, again, he alone manifests God's presence to the soul, for the Lord said to Moses when he promised that his Angel should go before him, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest," as if where his Angel was, there was his presence. (Ex. 32:34-33:14.)

Thus hence we see how the Lord Jesus is "the Angel of God's presence;" and as he was eternally in his presence, so he came forth from that presence to do the work appointed, which was to save: for "the Angel of his presence saved them;" and as such he was "mighty to save." Those, then, were the words that he claimed for himself as descriptive of his character and work, when the church asked him who he was. "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." He came forth then in order to save; and depend upon it, if he came forth from God's presence as the Angel of his presence on purpose to save, he would never enter that presence again until he had saved. If a King send an ambassador to perform a certain office, he cannot return until he has discharged it. So with our blessed Lord: he did not go back into his Father's presence until he had done the work

entrusted to his hands to perform. As he himself said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do;" and again, with expiring breath, "It is finished." (John 17:4; 19:30.)

And O how blessed it is to see that the Angel of his presence *saves*, fully, perfectly, eternally saves. Salvation is not in man—in the creature; in our own words or our own works; in our own goodness or our own badness. But salvation is in the Son of God. "Who *hath* saved us," already saved us, by his blood and righteousness upon earth (2 Tim. 1:9); and "able to save to the uttermost," by the manifestation of it from heaven. (Heb. 7:25.) O glorious sight! to view by the eye of faith the angel of God's presence coming forth from the courts of bliss, and by his obedience, by his blood-shedding, his meritorious sacrifice and death, saving the Church of God with an everlasting salvation.

But this salvation, so glorious and so effectual, must reach our heart; it must come down into our soul, as the Angel of the Covenant came down from the presence of the Father. But how does it come? By the manifested presence of God: for the Angel of his presence saves. When, then, the Angel of his presence manifests that presence to the soul; when that same Jesus who died upon the cross enters the heart in his love, and blood, and power, then he saves us by the manifestation of his presence as the Christ of God. Thus the Angel of his presence saves not only actually and meritoriously by his finished work upon the cross, but saves feelingly and experimentally by the presence of God which he brings into the soul.

Has he saved you? Ask yourself that question. Has the Angel of his presence come into your breast to bring salvation? Now we only know salvation by the blessed Lord coming into

our heart in his presence, in some gracious discovery of his blood, of his obedience, and dying love. When he thus manifests himself, then we see him and know him. Our gracious Lord, therefore, said to his disciples, "But ye see me; because I live ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) He then who has seen the Lord by faith, and felt his presence by power, is a saved man; for the Angel of his presence has saved him not only actually by the blood of the cross, but experimentally in his own heart.

iv. "He *bare* them, and *carried* them all the days of old." Now comes the *fourth* gracious dealing of the Lord with his people—*Support*. We may thus, I think, interpret the words: "He *bare* them out of Egypt," and "*carried*" them in, and through the wilderness into the promised rest. These two things comprehend every blessing in a way of gracious support, and are in fact the fruit of redemption and of the manifestation of salvation.

1. "He *bare* them" out of Egypt. This is beautifully expressed in the words, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." (Exod. 19:4.) The idea is of snatching them out of Egypt as an eagle would snatch her young away from the hands of the spoiler of her nest, and bear them away and aloft on her outstretched wings. Separation from idolatry, from bondage, from a state of degradation and abject slavery, is the leading idea of bringing the people out of Egypt, and this for the express purpose that they might be the Lord's people—a peculiar people. So, spiritually, the Lord bears us out of a worse Egypt by his Almighty power. Has he brought you out of the worse than Egyptian bondage of "serving divers lusts and pleasures?" Has he given you some deliverance from the world and the spirit of it, and brought you to himself by the power of his grace? Has he borne you

up out of sin—its open commission, its secret practice, its inward indulgence, and broken in some measure the love and the power of it? Has he borne you not only out of the grosser iniquities of Egypt, but its more refined and specious sins, such as creature idolatry, love of art and science, lip-service, self-righteousness, and mocking God by superstition, tradition, and vain ceremony? Has he borne you, as on eagles' wings, out of all "the idols of Egypt?" for it was a land teeming with idolatry, and therefore an apt emblem of this idol-making, idol-loving world.

2. But "he *carried* them all the days of old." He did not merely bear them out of Egypt, but carried them into, and through, and out of the great and terrible wilderness. Thus, like a tender Father, he carried and supported them, gave them manna to eat and brought water out of the rock for them to drink, when, but for his gracious power, they would have dropped out of his arms, and died in the wilderness almost at their first entrance into it. Now do you take a review of similar gracious dealings with yourself? Look at these things in the light of your own experience, and see how far they bear upon the path in which you have been personally and experimentally led. Look back and see how the Lord has borne and carried you all the days of old—what tenderness, kindness, love, and mercy he has ever shown you. To read this in the light of our own experience is to see our personal interest in the gracious dealings of a covenant God.

II.—But I now pass on to take a view of the *requitals*—what I have called "the *perverse requitals*," with which the children of Israel, types and figures of the saints of God, repaid the Lord for all his gracious dealings with them. "They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit." O what not only perverse, but base requitals! O what a cruel, provoking recompense for his

favours! O how deeply died in sin must they have been so to requite the Lord for his gracious and merciful dealings towards them!

1. "*They rebelled.*" This is just what we do, for there is no use blaming them. Let us take it to ourselves. But how do we rebel? By word or action? By both, but mainly by action, and chiefly by choosing our own way instead of the Lord's way. Rebellion does not consist, as some suppose, merely in angry feelings or unbecoming words; it often consists more in conduct than in expressions. Some think that they have no rebellion against the Almighty because they are quiet, placid people. But with all their quietness, this placid people can quietly choose their own way and will instead of the Lord's. Then they are rebels. To prefer our own will to the Lord's will, and to set up our own profit, pleasure, or inclination as our guide and rule instead of the precepts of the gospel and the holy commands of God,—this is rebellion. It does not consist merely in fretful thoughts, peevish expressions, and murmuring minds, but in actions, whereby we depart from the right ways of the Lord. What was Saul's rebellion, which was "as the sin of witchcraft?" Rejecting the word of the Lord; disobedience to the expressed will of God. (1 Sam. 15:23.) Tried by this standard, very many are guilty of rebellion, out of whose lips a rebellious word has never passed. They rebel by their actions. This, then, is what the Lord took such notice of: that all his pity and love and mercy toward his people of old did not constrain them to live to his praise, or walk in his fear; but though he had done so much for them, still they were disobedient children, who set up their own pleasures, their own aims, their own desires, in opposition to the right ways and right will of the Lord.

2. And by so rebelling, they "*vexed,*" or, as the word rather means, "*grieved,*" "his holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit was

grieved and pained, so to speak, so far as God can be pained, by their rebellion and disobedience, their determined disposition to have their own way, come what would. This obstinacy in ill-doing, this stubbornness and self-will, grieved and vexed God's holy Spirit, who would have them to be tender, obedient and submissive. These two features we see stamped upon their whole history. They vexed him also by neglecting his admonitions, by giving no heed to his gracious warnings, by despising his precepts, and by setting at nought his wise directions. Thus by their slighting, neglecting, and hardening their heart against the wise admonitions and gracious instructions of the Spirit in the word, they grieved and vexed God's holy Spirit. I am not going to answer the cavils of cavilling minds as how far God the Spirit can be grieved or vexed. I take God's word as God has revealed it. I read there, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30.) I believe therefore, on the authority of God's word, that God the Spirit can be grieved; and so here I read, that they vexed his holy Spirit. I therefore take God's word, and believe that the holy Spirit may be vexed. I admit there is a difficulty in it, but if you can explain every difficulty in God's word, I cannot. I am content to believe what I cannot explain, and receive what I cannot comprehend.

But what is the consequence of vexing the Holy Spirit? He withdraws his gracious influences; he leaves the soul to reap what it has sowed; and as it sows thorns, it reaps briers; as it sows weeds, it reaps thistles; as it sows to the flesh, of the flesh it reaps corruption.

III.—But we will now consider our third point, what the Lord in consequence was *provoked* to do, for "God is not mocked." "He was turned to be their *enemy* and he *fought* against them." We see all through the history of the children of

Israel, that, notwithstanding all the goodness, love, and mercy of God toward them, they were always rebelling and vexing his holy Spirit. Then we see that the Lord turned to be their enemy and fought against them, from their coming out of Egypt till the destruction of Jerusalem. In this, as in many other points, they were a typical people; for as the apostle says, "All these things happened unto them for ensamples," or "types," as the margin reads. (1 Cor.10:11.) In their case the Lord became their *actual* enemy and destroyed them, for they were judged as individuals, though as a people they were types. But the Lord never *really* turns to be the enemy of those to whom he is eternally a friend; for there cannot be real enmity in the bosom of God against any of his people. "Fury is not in me" (Isa. 27:4); "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3), are his own words; and where there is no fury but everlasting love, there can be no enmity. But he acts toward them as if he were their enemy. Provoked by their conduct, he displays himself to them, not as a kind Father and friend, but as one whom they had themselves compelled to change all the current of his goodness toward them, and to act as if he were their open and avowed enemy, that they might feel, deeply and bitterly feel, the consequences of their disobedience.

His hand often goes out against them in *providence*. Thus the Lord sometimes afflicts the body and sometimes the substance; for some of whom we would hope well often show a sad covetous spirit, ever grasping all they can, seeking to rise in the world, and apparently esteeming nothing so much as adding to their store. The Lord will often smite such in their tenderest point—their darling money, making holes in their money-bag through severe and unexpected losses and cross providences. (Haggai 1:6.) Others he smites in their families—that tender spot. Or he may turn to be their enemy, as God raised up Jeroboam to be the enemy of Solomon, by

stirring up cruel and bitter enemies from various quarters against them. Nay, he may even turn the hearts of his own people—that most cutting stroke of all, against them, so that, instead of loving them, they may even doubt their religion; and instead of holding them fast and firm in their arms, almost shake them out of their lap as if they were deceivers and hypocrites. In this, and many other ways, which I cannot now enter into, the Lord fights against his rebellious people.

Now if they have any right teachings, any truly gracious feelings, this one thing will prove it—whether they fall under God's afflicting hand, or whether they rebel more and more against him. In the case of the Lord's people who rebel and vex his Holy Spirit and he turns to be their enemy, they are brought down sooner or later into repentance at his feet. They hear the rod and who hath appointed it; they confess their sin, they forsake it, and they find mercy. (Micah 6:9; Prov. 28:13.) This opens a way for the Lord to return, as he says, "I will return, and have compassion on them" (Jer. 12:15), which brings us to our *fourth* and last point—the Lord's *gracious return* to his people.

IV.—This is not indeed exactly in the text, but may be gathered from the verse preceding it, where the Lord says, "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour." And if "their Saviour," a complete Saviour, which he would not be, were he their real or perpetual enemy.

But do look at two points, which seem so peculiarly and blessedly to stamp them as distinct from all other people.

1. First, hear the Lord himself say, "Surely, they are *my* people." "After all, be they what they may in the eyes of others, and even in spite of all their rebellion, and my turning

to be their enemy—still, still they are my people." *That* is conclusive. That settles the point. It is like the clinching words of a father after you have been telling him all the faults of one of his children, "He is my child." This closes up all. "I am grieved and vexed," he adds, "at what you tell me; but I am still his father, and cannot, will not cast him off."

2. But observe also what I may call the *saving clause*, which describes their character, and how the Lord marks and approves of his grace in the heart. Though they rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit, still they were children who would not lie. Mark how the Lord put his hand upon that holy principle which he had himself implanted in their bosom—the principle of not lying, the sacred germ of integrity and truth. "So he was their Saviour." Thus, though they had rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit, and he had turned to be their enemy and fought against them, yet there were in him relentings of heart; for "he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?" The holy Spirit within them was the reason that they did not lie. Thus, as partakers of his holy Spirit, the Lord represents himself as looking upon them with pity; in his own time and way condescending to return, advancing in his dyed garments from Bozrah to their help, and, as such, "glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength." Instead, then, of coming to destroy, he comes to save. When they were looking at his garments dyed in blood and expecting next to be trampled in the wine-press of his wrath, he comes with words of grace in his mouth and deliverance in his hands. "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." As speaking in righteousness, all his words are true—founded in righteousness and revealing righteousness; and, as mighty to save, he saves them from all their destructions, to make to

himself an "everlasting name," that heaven and earth might be filled with his glory.