

Spiritual Paradoxes

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Nov. 25, 1860

"As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." 2 Cor. 6:9, 10

What a portrait does the apostle draw in this chapter of a servant of Jesus Christ! What a description does he give of a true ambassador of God to the souls of men! We see sometimes portraits of distinguished characters, or read descriptions of their features, manners, dress, and appearance; and these are often so correct that were we thrown into their company, we should at once recognise them from their resemblance to what we have thus seen and read of them, though they themselves were previously personally unknown to us. Now if we were to take through the length and breadth of the land this portrait of a Christian minister, this description of a servant of God, as delineated by Paul in the chapter before us, and examine by this portrait and by this description all or any who call themselves ministers of Christ and servants of God, how many, think you, should we find to correspond with, I will not say the whole, but even a good part of the character and description here given? Not to press it too closely, take but two verses as merely a part of the whole description, distinct from our text which furnishes another portion: "By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." (2 Cor. 6:6, 7.) Now who can say that we have any lack of professed servants of Jesus Christ and ministers

of the gospel in this country? We may safely assume that in this or that town there are six men in or out of the National Establishment who call themselves servants of God and ministers of Jesus Christ; or, to bring it to a narrower point, let us suppose that in this or that village there is but one resident clergyman who shall consider himself, as many we know do, alone commissioned to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Assume also a circumstance by no means uncommon, that, strong in his episcopal ordination and legal title, he should denominate and denounce all other unordained preachers who may come within the bounds of his parish schismatics. Surely, with such firm and strongly asserted claims to be an ambassador of God, he could not reasonably object to a comparison with the portrait and description given of one by an inspired apostle, especially as he says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ;" and, "But in all things *approving* ourselves as the ministers of God." How far he could stand such a test the great day must decide.

But you will perhaps say, "Look at home. Never mind other men. How do your own credentials stand? Where and what are you when compared with Paul's portrait and description of a minister of God and a servant of Jesus Christ?" In reply to your question, I hope that the Lord has given me both inward and outward testimonies that I am one though the least and last of his servants; but I frankly confess, when I compare myself with this description, and examine my features by this picture, I shrink into insignificance, and feel to come so deplorably short of the character and description of a minister of Christ as drawn by the pen of Paul, that I seem utterly unworthy of the name. But you will say, "If this be the case, why do you choose such a text as this? Why don't you take less lofty ground and find some lower standard?" I might ask, by way of answer, when a

schoolmaster is teaching a boy to write, why does he set before him a perfect copy slip? Or when a pupil is learning to engrave, or to draw, or to chisel, why is he furnished by his teacher with the best models? Because he knows there is no other way whereby he can learn to write, or engrave, or draw, or make a statue properly. If you set before him bad copy slips he will never write a good hand, for he will naturally follow the pattern placed before him; and so if you give him faulty models, he will never attain to any degree of excellency as an artist or a sculptor. These perfect models show him also his own deficiencies, and thus not only teach him what true excellence is, but make and keep him humble by giving him to see and feel how far he is from it.

But the words of the apostle are not only descriptive of a Christian minister, but also of a Christian people; for the experience of a servant of God in almost every point except that of the ministry does not differ from theirs, nor does he walk in a different path from them. His is the same faith, his the same hope, his the same love, his the same trials, his the same consolations; so that though the words of our text do in the first instance specially apply to the servants of Christ, yet they are so comprehensive as to take in, not them only, but every one in whose heart God is working by his Holy Spirit. Were it not so, why should I preach from the words this morning? You are not a congregation of preachers, but simple hearers of the gospel. If therefore the text has no bearing upon you, why should I attempt to speak from it this day? But it is as much a description of the experience of a private Christian as of a minister of Christ: and so I think you will find it, if I am enabled to lay bare its spiritual and experimental meaning.

But when in this spirit we come to look at it a little more closely, we may well call our text a chain of paradoxes. And

observe how each spiritual paradox is fastened together by a double link. In seeking therefore this morning to unwind this chain, I shall take up these double links in the order in which they present themselves to my hand.

"As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

I.—Let us look, first, at the double link that presents itself in the very opening of our text: "*As unknown and yet well known.*"

i. This is true in a *literal sense*. God's people, as well as God's servants, are little known and less esteemed in this world. It is God's purpose and a part of his infinite wisdom that it should be so. The Lord is training up heirs of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and preparing them for those mansions of holiness and bliss which he has prepared for them before the foundation of the world. But whilst they are here below they are in a state of obscurity. We may compare them to a large and valuable diamond, which is now undergoing the operations of cutting and polishing in some obscure court in the city, no one scarcely knowing of its existence or value but its owner and the jeweller who is patiently cutting it into shape. But one day it may adorn a monarch's crown. So whilst God is cutting and polishing his diamonds by trials and temptations, sufferings and afflictions, they are hidden from the eyes of men, many of them literally and actually in obscure alleys and courts, in garrets and alms-houses; but when the Lord maketh up his jewels, they will shine forth for ever in the mediatorial crown. God has chosen the poor of this world for the most part to be rich in faith. Not many notable in the annals of learning,

power, or rank; not many noble, not many rich, not many mighty, has he called by his grace to a knowledge of himself. The Lord's people rarely possess any wealth, station, property, or worldly distinction. They are for the most part poor and despised, as their Lord and Master was before them, and such the world cares neither to know nor notice.

But not only in a *literal* sense are the saints and servants of God unknown to the men of this world, but they are *spiritually* unknown. What does the world know of their sorrows, their distress of conscience, the bitterness they feel under the application of a broken law, under the hidings of God's face, under the cruel temptations of Satan, under the misgivings and fears, the doubts and exercises, by which they are so cast down? And what does it know of their joys and consolations, deliverances and manifestations; the sweet discoveries of the blood and grace of Christ to their heart; the love of God shed abroad in their soul, and the inward witness of the Spirit to their spirit that they are God's children? As they are unknown in their sorrows, they are unknown in their joys; for their joy is that which a stranger intermeddleth not with. What does the world know of their doubts and fears; of their misgivings and apprehensions whether the work upon their hearts be genuine, whether they have an interest in the finished work of the Son of God, whether what they have experienced has been wrought in their soul by a divine power? What does the world know of their earnest and prayerful desires after God and their seeking after his presence and favour; of what they feel and enjoy in hearing their experience described by a servant of God, and the testimony thereby afforded to the reality of the work upon their heart? What does the world know of the breaking in of the light of the Lord's countenance, and the sweet springing up of a good hope through grace? What does the world know of their temptations to disbelieve and

question every sacred truth, or what they experience under the fiery darts of Satan, stirring up every base and bad feeling in their wretched hearts? Or what does the world know of their deliverance from these temptations, the support they receive under them, and the way in which the Lord makes them work for their spiritual good? Look at the dying believer: what does the world know of the sweet consolation which that dying believer is experiencing in the very agony of death? What does it see of the glorious vision of an eternal crown which the Holy Ghost anoints his dying eyes to behold as eternally his? What does it see of the choir of angels surrounding his bed, and how they are waiting to waft his soul to heaven?

ii. But if "unknown," yet—and here is the paradox—they are *well known*.

1. They are well known *to God the Father*, for he knew them with the foreknowledge of approbation when he chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world. We therefore read "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:2); and "whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate." (Rom. 8:29.)

But God the Father knoweth them also in time as well as eternity; for he "knoweth the way of the righteous." He knows therefore every thought of their heart, every word of their lip, every action of their hands. He knows too all their wants, with every desire that springs up in their mind, every secret cry and inward groan, every feeling of contrition, brokenness, repentance, and humility; all their self-abasement and self-loathing on account of sin, with all their confessions and supplications before the throne of grace. He knows too the faith that he himself gives them to lay hold of the Son of his love; the hope he inspires in his mercy, the

love he sheds abroad to his name. These things are not concealed from the eye of God, who searches all hearts, and before whom every secret lies naked and bare. How beautifully is all this expressed in Psalm 139: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me." (Psal. 139:1-5.)

2. Nor are they unknown to the *Lord Jesus Christ*; for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." And does he not say "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine?" And again, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." They often do not know themselves, for the work of grace is obscured by the darkness of their minds and the unbelief of their hearts. But he can distinguish his own work, not only from any base imitation of it, but in the depths of its obscurity. He can see sincerity, uprightness, godly fear at work in the hearts of his people, though they may be tempted to think there is nothing in them but insincerity and hypocrisy. The Lord can discern his own work and his own grace, however weak, feeble, or disputed; and therefore however low his people may sink, he knows all their sinkings and all their risings, all their temptations and all their afflictions; and not only so, but he is able to stretch forth his hand to give support under them and deliver out of them.

3. And they are well known to the *Holy Ghost*, who began the work of grace upon their heart, who is poured out upon them and abides in them as a Spirit of grace and of supplications, who helps their infirmities, teaches them how to pray and

what to pray for, and intercedes in them and for them with groanings which cannot be uttered. He knows when and what promises to apply to their hearts, and how to comfort them in their afflictions, to reveal Christ to them, and form him in them the hope of glory.

4. And they are well known by each other, even when they are not known to each other; for they are taught by the same Spirit, led into the same faith, have the same sorrows and the same joys, can speak the same language, are walking in the same path of tribulation, and are looking forward to the same heavenly crown.

5. Ministers of Christ also are in another sense, "though unknown, yet *well known*." There is spread through this country a people little known and observed by the world, but who are in close union with each other; and by this people the real servants of Christ are well known and highly esteemed. Being taught by the same Spirit, there is a fellow feeling in the saints of God, uniting them to each other and to the servants of God, and kindling in the bosom love and affection to those whom they only know by their writings, or their general acceptability to the living members of the mystical body of Christ.

II.—But now we come to another double link, equally mysterious, equally paradoxical, yet equally susceptible of a gracious interpretation: "*As dying, and, behold, we live.*"

i. This is true *literally*. Many of the Lord's people are dying the greater part of their lives, and yet live till their work is done. It is just thirty years ago since I was first laid aside from the work of the ministry by a severe and protracted illness, mainly brought on I believe by hard labour; for I was then in the Church of England, and like most zealous young

men worked hard in my parish, preaching, lecturing, and visiting the poor, beyond my bodily strength. But by that illness I was so prostrated, that I scarcely got over it for several years, and indeed have never fully recovered from it to this day. Thus in a sense I have been dying these last thirty years, and yet I live, and shall live until my work is done. And yet a great deal of work since then I have done both with tongue and pen, for I have an active mind in a weak body, and hate idleness whether in myself or others.

But look at the words in a *spiritual sense*. How true it is that the Lord's people are always dying. How they die for instance under the law. When Moses comes with the application of the fiery law, it burns up all the dross and tin of their self-righteousness. How they sink under the feeling sense of the wrath of God, so as sometimes to have scarcely any more hope of being saved than those at this moment in hell! How they die under this killing sentence of a fiery law to their own righteousness: how they die to their own strength and wisdom and every creature hope: and how they die to any expectations of being saved by the works of the flesh or by any obedience the creature can pay! And not only once or twice do they thus die, but they are always dying. Continual discoveries of the majesty of God, of his holiness and purity, with a daily sense of their own sinfulness, weakness, helplessness, and inability to deliver their own souls—all these things working in them, make them in a spiritual sense to be dying every day. As the apostle speaks of himself, "I die daily." Thus they die to all hope of salvation by the works of the law, die to all idea of strength as wrought by an arm of flesh, die to any expectation of happiness in this world, any prospect of creature enjoyment, or any fancied paradise of earthly pleasure. They carry, too, about with them more or less a daily sense of their mortality, often meditate upon their latter end, and feel that the time must shortly come

when the scythe of death will cut them down, and lay their body in the grave.

ii. But though they thus die, yet *they live*. When the law first arrested you with its tremendous curse, and brought the sentence of death into your conscience, it was not to kill you outright, but to make you alive unto God. It was a sentence of death in itself, but it was a living Spirit who applied it. So dying under the law, yet that you were quickened into divine life, was made manifest. To cry and sigh for mercy, to groan for pardon, to be favoured with a spirit of prayer and supplication, and with wrestlings and beseechings to God for mercy,—are not these evidences that there was life even in death? When God strikes with fiery displeasure a reprobate, it is like Joab striking Amasa: he strikes not again: he needs not to "double his stroke," as the margin reads. (2 Sam. 20:10.) When God struck Saul and Judas, he did not strike them twice. I was reading the other day an instance in the life of godly Mr. Welch, one of the old Scotch Covenanters. He was entertaining some company with godly conversation and amongst those present was a profane youth, who openly mocked, sneered, and ridiculed what he said upon the solemn matters of eternity. The godly man paused a moment, looked at him, and said aloud, "Behold the judgment of God." In a moment the profane youth fell dead under the table. He died at once under the manifested wrath of God. No second stroke was needed; down came the sword of justice and cleft him asunder before the frightened guests. Have you not sometimes feared lest you might so die too, an awful monument of the just displeasure of the Almighty? But the Lord did not so deal with you. He smote you with his rod, not with his sword. He smote you not that you should die under his frown, but that you might repent and live. "By these things men live," said the afflicted king Hezekiah, "and in all these things is the life of my spirit." (Isai. 38:16.)

But not only in the first dealings of God with the soul, but all through the godly man's experience he is ever dying, yet behold a mystery—he is ever living. At this time of the year the trees for the most part drop their leaves; but do the trees die? They are rather preparing themselves for a spring suit; and when the warm days of April and May return, those dead branches will re clothe themselves with foliage. So it is with the soul. Your faith may seem almost gone, your hope to be removed, and your love to drop out of your soul as the leaves drop from a tree in autumn; but behold, you live. There is life in the root, life in the stem. Look at the vine at this time of the year, especially if it has undergone a sharp pruning: the grapes all gone, the leaves dropped off, the branches apparently dead; but when the spring returns there will be a revival. So it is with you. Like the vine, you may have dropped the leaf, or the sharp pruning knife of affliction may have cut into the branch; but in due time you will again put forth leaves and flowers and fruit. Is not this Scripture language and a Scripture figure? My figures are sometimes objected to as natural, not Scriptural comparisons; but this time I will not so offend the critical ear. What says the prophet? "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." (Isai. 6:13.) Thus, though the teil tree and the oak cast their leaves, yet the holy seed is in them—in "stock and stem" (margin), and this gives them an enduring substance and a future revival.

Thus, though we die and die daily, yet behold, we live; and in a sense, the *more* we die, the *more* we live. The more we die to self, the more we die to sin; the more we die to pride and self-righteousness, the more we die to creature strength; and the more we thus die to nature, the more we live to grace. And this runs all the way through the life and

experience of a Christian. Nature must die that grace may live. The weeds must be plucked up that the crop may grow; the flesh be starved that the spirit may be fed; the old man put off that the new man may be put on; the deeds of the body be mortified that the soul may live unto God. As then we die, we live. The more we die to our own strength, the more we live to Christ's strength; the more we die to creature hope, the more we live to a good hope through grace; the more we die to our own righteousness, the more we live to Christ's righteousness; and the more we die to the world, the more we live to and for heaven. This is the grand mystery, that the Christian is always dying, yet always living: and the more he dies, the more he lives. The death of the flesh is the life of the spirit; the death of sin is the life of righteousness; and the death of the creature is the very life of God in the soul.

III.—But let us pass on to our next double link; for these paradoxes are most blessedly linked together, and each one strengthens and confirms the other: *"As chastened, and not killed."*

Chastisement is part of the covenant: that is God's own declaration of it in Psalm 89: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David." (Psalm 89:30-35.) And is not this New Testament language too? How striking, how decisive are the words of the apostle: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children: My son, despise not thou the

chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If we endure chastening, God dealeth with us as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. 12:5-8.) There are men in our day who deny chastisement; who would take the rod out of God's hands, and boldly teach that the Lord never chastens his people. All I can say of them is, that they proclaim their own bastardy. They say with a loud voice to the world, "whatever others are, we are illegitimate." Now a man must be dead to shame to make such a proclamation. A person told me some years ago that she heard a well-known London preacher thus open his sermon, "I am a bastard!" Methinks he need not have thus openly revealed his mother's sin and shame, or made a sport for the profane. But what he was bold enough to proclaim of himself literally these men proclaim of themselves spiritually, when they say, "The rod of God never has been, and never will be upon me." Can they not see, that in denying the chastening hand of God, they deny that they are the children of God? But all the Lord's people know by their own experience that he is a chastening God, for they have often felt the rod upon their own back.

i. But *what* are these chastenings?

1. Some of them are *bodily*. We find this spoken of by Elihu in the book of Job, where, describing the way in which God sometimes deals with his people, he says, "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out." (Job 33:19-21.) This is a description of God's chastening the

body. A large share have I had of that rod from God's hand, and in a measure am experiencing it now. But the Lord does not see fit to lay the same chastisements upon all his people. He has rods of different sizes and different descriptions; though all are felt to be rods when God brings them upon the back.

2. There are *family afflictions* which the Lord sometimes makes use of as chastening rods. Such are bereavements of those near and dear in the prime of life, just when they seem most needed, as the husband to sustain the scantily provided wife, the father to bring up the children, the mother to nurse the new-born babe. Few are there who have families who have not tasted the bitter as well as the sweet. And children can be made rods as well as comforts, as Isaac, Jacob, Eli, and David found to their grief and sorrow.

3. *Providential trials* are sometimes twigs of this chastising rod. Heavy losses in business, unexpected and unavoidable calls on a small income, entanglements through the default or dishonesty of others, perhaps children or relations, a worn out farm, a sinking shop, long doctor's bills—these are some of the deep trials of the middle classes, as hard to bear as loss of work and wages to the day-labourer. Attending these, as helping on the calamity, there fly about painful misgivings as to the future, dark clouds lowering over the mind, with many dismal apprehensions what the result may be to one's self and those dearer than self—the wife and family. Who shall say that the Lord does not make use of these providential trials and afflictions sometimes as a chastening rod?

But for the most part these chastenings are of an *inward* and *spiritual* nature. Hidings of his face, frowns of his brow, reproofs administered in the conscience, denials of answer to

prayer, secret rebukes, letting the soul hang in doubt which way the scale will turn, so that it trembles before his terrible Majesty,—in these and other ways the Lord chastises many of his dear family, that they may be partakers of his holiness.

ii. But though "chastened" by these afflictions, they are "not *killed*." The Lord chastises with one hand and upholds with the other. You may have passed in your spiritual experience under many chastising strokes; and when they fell upon you, they seemed to come as a killing sentence from God's lips. Your illness, you feared, might end in death; under your bereavement, you felt as if you never could hold up your head again; your providential losses you apprehended might prove your earthly ruin; your family afflictions seemed to be so heavy as to be radically incurable; the hidings of God's face so great that he never would look upon you with love again; the rebukes and reproofs of his voice so cutting that you felt as if he would never apply a promise to your soul any more. These were in your feelings *killing* strokes; but though chastened you were *not* killed. You lost no divine life thereby; but you lost much that pleased the flesh, much that gratified the creature, much that looked well for days of prosperity, but would not abide a storm. But you lost nothing that was for your real good. If you lost bodily health, you gained spiritual health; if you lost a dear husband or child, God filled up the void in your heart by making Christ more precious; if you had troubles in your family, the Lord made it up by giving more manifestations of his love and grace. Your very losses in providence were for your good, for he either made them up, or what you lost in providence he doubled in grace. So that though chastened, you are not killed. Is not your hope still alive? Does not the holy flame that God kindled in your bosom still burn, though it may burn dimly? Has anything that has happened to you in providence or in grace quenched, extinguished for ever the life of God in your

soul? Has it not rather brought it out more clearly? As the dross and tin were more separated, has not the gold shone more brightly? Have you not held spiritual things with a tighter grasp? When God chastens his people, it is not to kill them: it is to make them partakers of his holiness; it is to revive their drooping graces, to make them more sincere and upright and tender in conscience, to become more separate from the world, to seek more his glory, to have a more single eye to his praise, and to live more a life of faith upon the Son of God. Here is the blessedness, that when God chastises his people, it is not for their injury, but for their profit; not for their destruction, but for their salvation; not to treat them with the unkindness of an enemy, but with the love of a friend. Look at the afflictions, chastenings, grievous sorrows, and exercises that you have passed through. Have they been friends to you or enemies; instruments of helping you, or hindrances; ladders whereby you have climbed up to heaven, or steps whereby you have descended into hell; means of taking you near to Christ, or means of carrying you more into the spirit of the world? If you know anything of God's chastening, you will say, "Every stroke has brought me nearer to God; he has flogged me home." As a mother will seize her truant boy out of a mob of other children and flog him home, so the Lord sometimes flogs his children home; every stroke laid upon their back bringing them a step nearer to their home in the mansions above. In your own experience, therefore, without my teaching or explanation, you can set to your seal that God's chastenings have not killed you, but rather they have been the means of reviving and keeping alive the work of grace upon your heart.

IV.—But we now take hold of the next double link: "*As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.*"

Many of the Lord's people are stamped with a sorrowful

spirit; and had we a deeper sense of what this world is, and what we are as dying sinners in it, we should have more of a sorrowful spirit amongst us than we have. The world may dance, as it were, upon the very brink of hell; but the saint of God has much to make him sorrowful, for he feels himself to be a sinner in a sinful world, far from happiness and home. For the most part his path in *providence* is one of sorrow; and his very social cup is often embittered by many painful ingredients, for the Lord knows what our carnal mind is—that we should drink the cup of this life with gall and wormwood in it. But as regards *spiritual* things, how many causes there are that the Christian should be of a sorrowful spirit. When he looks at his blessed Lord, who was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," he sees an example to which he has to be conformed. We read that Jesus wept (John 11); we never read that Jesus laughed or even smiled. We read of his sighing and groaning in spirit (Mark 7:34; John 11:33), and that he "rejoiced in spirit." (Luke 10:21.) But he who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree" hath also "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." (Isai. 53:4.) Now we have to be conformed to this suffering image of the Lord Jesus; for we must "suffer with him if we are to be glorified together." (Rom. 8:17.) And the promise is sure: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (2 Tim. 2:12.) This made the apostle say, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.) And abundant cause there is for sorrow of heart. O if we could view by the eyes of faith how God looks down upon the world—what a scene of wickedness and abomination it is in his holy and pure eyes, we should carry about with us more of that sorrowful spirit which our blessed Lord so signally displayed. Can we wonder that the Lord Jesus was grieved for the hardness of men's hearts (Mark 3:5); or that his holy soul was pained within him at the continual spectacle of sin and

woe? A similar feeling will be in our breasts, if we are in any way imbued with the same spirit. If righteous Lot, dwelling among the wicked, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds (2 Pet. 2:8), should not we feel a measure of the same inward vexation with the filthy conversation of the wicked?

2. When, too, we turn from looking at others to look at ourselves, what fresh and additional reason we have to be sorrowful before God. Our shortcomings, our numerous slips and falls, our grievous backslidings, our little living to God's praise, our doing so little the things which are pleasing in his sight, our crooked tempers, vile imaginations, foolish words, vain thoughts, and many inconsistencies,—were these laid with any weight and power upon our conscience, they would make us sorrowful indeed, and force us often to smite upon our breast and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

3. To enjoy so few visits from Jesus, to know so little of his dying love, to walk so little in his holy, humble, self-denying footsteps, to have our affections so little fixed upon things above,—if these things were laid upon our conscience with greater weight and power, they would make us also of a sorrowful spirit.

4. To see how few there are who are walking in the straight and narrow way; to behold how many even of those who name the name of Christ do not depart from iniquity; to view how thousands round about us are filling up the measure of their iniquities, and upon whom the wrath of God will speedily fall; to feel how the name of God is openly blasphemed and abused, his mercies in providence disregarded, his truth hated and reviled, his people contemned and despised; to think how little professors of the truths of the gospel generally adorn the doctrine by a godly

life; how little fruit is borne by the church and congregation where the word of life has been preached for years; what strifes and divisions there are in all our churches; what abounding errors in many who have sat half their life-time under the sound of the gospel truth; and how little the Lord Jesus Christ is admired, loved, and honoured in this world by those who call themselves Christians, as if they were true followers of him,—if we carried about with us a deep and daily sense of these things we might well be sorrowful; for there is everything in self and in others, in the world and in the church, to make us of a sorrowful spirit before God. The apostle said of himself, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." (Rom. 9:1, 2.) Now what was the cause of this sorrow? It was for "his brethren, his kinsmen, according to the flesh," as seeing the hardness and unbelief of their hearts; and how again he says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." (2 Cor. 2:4.) Thus where there is love to the Lord, a zeal for his glory, and affection to his people, there will be continual occasion for sorrow of heart.

ii. And yet here again we have a spiritual paradox, that is, an apparent, but not real contradiction. The word "paradox" means literally "something contrary to expectation;" and does not this definition agree with all the spiritual paradoxes which we have been explaining? Thus the apostle says of himself, "As sorrowful, yet *always rejoicing*." Is not this a paradox—a thing contrary to expectation; what we never could have supposed probable or possible? For is it not a manifest contradiction that the same man should be ever sorrowful, yet be always rejoicing? It is as if the rejoicing bride and the mourning widow were one and the same

person. But what is a contradiction in nature is not a contradiction in grace. Let us seek then to solve the mystery, to open and unfold the paradox. And this we shall best do by setting before our eyes the Lord Jesus Christ. For in what or in whom are we to rejoice but in him? This made the apostle say, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." And do observe how he gives rejoicing in Christ Jesus as a mark of true circumcision. "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Phil. 3:3.) If we rejoice, then, it is not in ourselves, for the more we see of ourselves, the more cause we shall have for sorrow; not in our own strength, or wisdom, or righteousness, for I have already shown you that to all these things we have to die; and how can we rejoice in a thing of death? But if we rejoice it must be in the Lord Jesus, and what he is made of God unto us—"Wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." When, too, we are favoured with the visitations of his presence, we may rejoice in hope of eternal life; in a conscience made honest and tender in God's fear, and purged by the blood of sprinkling from filth, guilt, and dead works; in the promises as they are applied with power to the soul; in fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; in the views of rest and peace beyond the grave in that happy land where tears are wiped from off all faces, and the very names of sin and sorrow are unknown. Thus though the Christian in himself is sorrowful, and has reason to be so all the day long, yet so far as he has any views by faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, any good hope through grace, or any manifestation of his Person, work, blood, and love, he may be always rejoicing. Nay his very sorrow opens up a way for joy. There is no room in a worldly heart for spiritual joy, for the Lord gives joy in sorrow. When the heart is sunk in gloom and fear, and doubt and distress take possession of the mind, when family afflictions, or painful bereavements, or trying circumstances,

fill the heart with grief and dismay, that is the very time for the Lord to pour joy into the soul. As afflictions abound, so do consolations. Sorrow and joy are linked together as night and day, as sun and moon, as heaven and earth. Without sorrow, there can be no joy, for joy is its counterpoise. If you had everything your heart could desire, what room would there be for spiritual joy? But when all sources of earthly joy dry up, and there is nothing but sorrow and trouble before you in this world, as long as life remains; when you are afflicted in body, poor in circumstances, tried in your family, distressed in your mind, and there is nothing but grief and misery, then you have room as it were made in your heart to receive the sweet consolations of God's grace. Thus, so far from sorrow and joy being inconsistent with, or destructive of each other, whatever may be the case naturally, we may say that spiritually, one is needful, nay, indispensable to the other; for if there is no sorrow, there can be no joy. Nay, the more sorrow, the more joy: spiritual sorrow killing all earthly joy, and yet opening up a way for spiritual joy to come in. And is not this the very meaning and language of the apostle, where he says, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ?" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, 5.) So again he says, "Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you; I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." (2 Cor. 7:4.) Well then may we call these divine realities spiritual paradoxes: I say spiritual, because they are heavenly mysteries, and as such among the things which God has hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes. (Matt. 11:25.) If then you have not the key, you cannot open this cabinet; if you have not the

solution, you cannot decipher this riddle. But if you have the teaching of the Spirit, and understand anything of these divine mysteries by divine teaching, you will understand what it is to be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

V.—I now pass to another spiritual paradox: "*As poor, yet making many rich.*"

I. This paradox is especially applicable to the servants of God, many of whom, by far the great majority, are very poor in *worldly circumstances*. And the Lord sees fit it should be so, to make them more dependent upon himself in providence. Few men, very few, are fit to be trusted with money; for there is a tendency in the possession of property to lift up the mind, and make it, so to speak, independent of God. But all rules have their exceptions, and so it may be in this instance. But if all the servants of God are not poor in worldly circumstances, they are all poor, or at least should be so *in spirit*. He that is rich in his own eyes is not fit to speak to those who are poor in their own eyes. The rich man naturally has no sympathy with the poor man. A merchant upon 'Change with a hundred thousand pounds in his pocket has no sympathy with a bankrupt. A man sitting down to every delicacy and the choicest wines, has no sympathy with a beggar shivering with cold and hunger in the street. So if a minister has not been made poor in his own soul, he will not be much of a preacher to those who have been made poor in spirit. He that would bring forth the riches of the gospel must be made poor in soul, if not made poor in pocket—made poor in spirit, if not poor in substance.

But you may extend, as I have done before, the paradox to include others besides the servants of Christ. The saints of God then are made poor, as well as the servants of God, nor is there a feature more general, more descriptive, or more

characteristic of the family of God than poverty—I mean spiritual poverty. Were I to speak of great manifestations and deliverances, I might be shooting over some of your heads; but coming down to poverty and necessity, there I meet your case. If the Lord has but touched your heart with his finger, brought you down and laid you low at his feet, I shall meet you upon that ground, because he has stripped you or is stripping you of all creature sufficiency. Thus poverty of spirit is a feature common to every saint of God. How did the Lord open his ministry in the sermon upon the Mount? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If, therefore, you have no poverty of spirit, you have no kingdom as your inheritance; and recollect that we must enter into the kingdom of heaven upon earth, for it is "within us;" so that if you are not partakers of the kingdom of grace below you will not inherit the kingdom of glory above. But as I have spoken so much before on the same point and to the same effect under my preceding heads, I shall pass on to the second link of the paradox.

ii. And surely this is a paradox of paradoxes, a mystery of mysteries, that a poor man can *make many rich*.

If I were to walk out some day and find out upon examination that the stone quarries near this town concealed a gold mine, how many thousands would be glad to listen to such intelligence, and what a rush there would be if I could assure them that under a certain stone in a certain quarry there was a vein of gold. To-morrow would not pass without thousands flocking to pick it up. But tell them of the glorious riches of Christ, of the treasures of grace and glory which are hidden in the Person and work, blood and righteousness of an incarnate God, where is the heart to listen to that tale? Where is the hand stretched out to dig into that vein "which no fowl knoweth and which the vulture's eye hath not seen?"

And why is this but because there is no desire for the wealth which makes the soul rich for eternity. But what a view had the apostle of these riches when he said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. 3:8.) How remarkable the words, "The unsearchable riches of Christ." So he speaks also in another epistle: "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27); and again, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:3.) How low, how poor are all earthly riches compared with these heavenly treasures of which the Lord himself said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. 6:19, 20.)

But let us now see how the servants of God though poor yet *make many rich*. It is because God uses them as the means of conveying his kingdom into many a sinner's heart: and to make any rich for eternity is the greatest wealth God can bestow through the instrumentality of man. If the Lord has blessed my testimony to any of your consciences, I have done more for you than if I had given you a thousand pounds. You have more reason to bless God than if I could at this moment put a bag of gold into your hand; for that money might soon be spent. It would make you comfortable for a short space; but where would it be and of what value would you find it when death knocked at your door? But to be put into possession of a kingdom which cannot be moved, to be favoured and blessed with a knowledge of the eternal salvation of your soul, and to find in a dying hour the peace

of God in your heart, what language can express the value of a treasure like this? And yet God's servants, though poor, most of them literally and all of them spiritually, have this wonderful privilege committed to them that they make many rich. O how many a dying saint has blessed God for the ministry of the gospel; and how he can look back upon times and seasons when the preached word communicated to his soul that heavenly treasure of life, light, and power which is his support in the very arms of death. What an honour then is this which God confers upon his servants, that he enables them to enrich the souls of his people by instrumentally conveying into their heart the riches which are stored up in Christ Jesus. This, however, they can only do by preaching free grace, by holding up before the eyes of the people the Lord of life and glory as the only object of faith, hope, and love, by proclaiming the blood of the cross as the only way of pardon and peace, by tracing out the work of grace upon the heart as a means of encouraging the cast down and distressed, and setting before them salvation as the free gift of God. When, then, the poor and needy receive these glorious tidings into their heart under the power and unction of the blessed Spirit, and feel a sweet conviction of their interest in these heavenly realities, then are they made rich indeed. You who have been so blessed need not envy the wealthiest peer who ever walked before the Queen in a robe of ermine and with a coronet in his hand: you need not envy the King of Italy with his newly acquired kingdom, nor the Emperor of the French at the head of his armies, if God has put his fear into your heart and blessed you with a living faith in his dear Son; for all these earthly pageants will sooner or later come to a close. I am not speaking, I would have you observe, against kings and queens, rank and station, for all these things are necessary in a time state, and it is only the "presumptuous and self-willed" who "despise government and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." (2 Pet. 2:10.) I

bless God that we have in this country a gradation of ranks and stations, and that society is linked together from the Queen on the throne to the ploughman in the field. But what is good for time is of no avail for eternity. Thus all earthly dignity, wealth, rank, and power pass away, like a pageant moving over a stage: but those who are blessed with a living faith, with a good hope in God's mercy and any discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ to their souls to make them love his dear name will live for ever and ever; yea, live when time itself shall be no more. As our Lord said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43); or, as it is so beautifully expressed by the prophet Daniel: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. 12:3.) What riches, I may well ask, are to be compared with this? If the gold of all California and all Australia with all the bullion in the Bank cellars could be made yours, what would they be in comparison with shining as a star for ever and ever in the kingdom of glory?

VI.—But now we come to our last double link of these spiritual paradoxes: "*as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*"

i. This is true sometimes in a *literal* sense, but as I have before sufficiently dwelt upon this point I shall not again call your attention to it, but direct your thoughts to its *spiritual* meaning. How true then it is, in a spiritual sense, both of ministers and people, both of the servants and the saints of God, that they have nothing. Have you not looked at your heart again and again, pondered over your past words and works, examined the whole course of your life, viewed and reviewed it both before and after you made a profession of religion? Now when you have taken a solemn view of

yourself, probing and examining heart and life by the light of God's word, have you not come to the conclusion that you have been and are exceedingly vile; and that as regards your best attainments you are nothing and less than nothing; for whatever you have done, even with the best motives and to the highest ends, has been effectually marred, as stained and polluted by sin? Suppose a manufacturer gave to a weaver a quantity of beautiful silk for him to weave out of it a costly robe for the Queen, and suppose that when he had executed his task with great labour and skill, he purposely or accidentally spilt a bottle of ink over it. Would his employer take it? Could it be made up into a royal robe? He would say, "You have spent a vast deal of labour upon this piece of silk, but look at it. It is covered with ink; I cannot take it. It is worthless and valueless by your folly or mismanagement." So man may work and work and work again to weave for himself a robe of righteousness, but if sin is spilt all over his work, how can God accept it at his hands? The manufacturer will not accept spoiled work; and can we therefore expect that God will take work which sin has polluted? That holy Being, before whose eyes the heavens themselves are not clean, will he take the polluted work of a polluted soul, and crown it with eternal glory? Thus when you view and review the works of your hands, and the words of your lips, what claim have you upon God? Within the last thirty years I must have preached thousands of sermons and travelled thousands of miles in the service of the sanctuary. But can I bring any of these words and works before God's heart searching eye, as possessing any merit, when the sin of my heart, poured all over them like the bottle of ink, has spoiled them all? And what is all my knowledge and learning, if I have any; all my natural and acquired abilities, if I possess them; and all my gifts, if endowed with them; what is all I have done in these thirty years for the Lord and his people, if the inward sin of my heart has run over, stained, and defiled

it all? So in taking a solemn review of all I have and am as a Christian man or minister, and all I have said, thought, and done, I feel that sin has defiled the whole. Then I have nothing. I cannot boast of my gifts, my abilities, my knowledge, my learning, or labours, because the inward sin of my heart has polluted and defiled all my words, works, and ways. Then I have nothing; I am a beggar, living upon alms; and are not you the same, if the Lord has stripped you of all your strength, wisdom, and goodness?

ii. Yet, mystery of mysteries, paradox of paradoxes, though we have nothing, yet *we possess all things*. But how do we possess all things? In possessing Christ who is heir of all things. If we possess Christ, what have we not in him? We have wisdom to teach us, righteousness to justify us, sanctification to make us holy, and redemption to deliver us from sin, death, and hell. If we have him, we have the favour and love of God; we have the pardon of our sins, the reconciliation of our persons, the casting behind God's back of all our backslidings, and a title to a heavenly crown. If we have him, we have everything in him, for Christ is ours, and Christ is God's. Therefore in him we possess all things. We shall have in providence things sufficient to carry us to the grave. He will give us everything that is for our good, and keep back nothing that is for our benefit. If we possess him, what have we not in him? Now the world, when death comes, what has it? Nothing to look to but the anger of God and a fearful judgment. But the saint of God, when death comes to him, what has he to look to? A crown of life, a mansion in the skies, a smiling God, and a blessed assurance that he shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Thus though the saints of God have nothing, yet they possess all things; and possessing a heavenly crown, what can God give them more? He has given his dear Son that he might shed his atoning blood to wash away their sins, and work out a

perfect righteousness to justify their persons. He has now given them a complete salvation, and in giving them that he has withheld nothing; for in not keeping back his Son, he has kept nothing back that his loving heart could bestow. This made Paul say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32.)

Now see how far you can lay your experience side by side with these heavenly paradoxes; and you must take them together. You must not take the bright side and leave out the dark; take the riches and trample upon the poverty; take "possessing all things," and not take "having nothing." You must take them as God has put them, for they are linked together, and what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. If you can find these heavenly paradoxes, these divine mysteries wrought by a divine power in your soul, you are sure of heaven. God is as much your God, as he was Paul's; Christ as much your Christ, and heaven as much your own. But if you know nothing of these paradoxes in your own experience, I would plainly ask you how you expect to meet him who is a consuming fire? The Lord enable you to lay these things to heart.