

## **The Faith and Confession, Life and Death of a Pilgrim**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 29, 1866

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." Hebrews 11:13, 14

There never was, there never can be but one religion, I mean, of course, one true religion. There can no more be two religions, that is, two true religions, than there can be two Gods, that is, two true Gods. The words of the apostle are decisive upon this point. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:4, 5, 6.) How plainly does this testimony from the word of truth prove that there can be but one true religion. As naturally, so spiritually, there is but "one body"—the mystical body of Christ. Have you two bodies or one? So with Christ mystical. Has he two bodies or one? And what is this body but the Church, according to those words? "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:22, 23.) And as there is but "one body," so there is but "one Spirit," which is, so to speak, the animating soul of that one body. Have you two souls or one? Similarly as there is but "one body"—the mystical body of Christ, so there is but "one Spirit," by whom we are baptised into that one body. These are two grand facts to lay hold of, two grand truths to believe and abide by; and were they more fully believed, and more faithfully acted upon, there would be

much less error and much less evil in the professing church. Now, flowing out of the oneness of the body and the oneness of the Spirit, there is but "one faith," "one hope," and "one baptism;" and as the Object of this one faith, of this one hope, and of this one baptism, there is but "one Lord," the Lord Jesus Christ, and but "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all."

But were there no other testimony than this in the word of God; did not the whole current of divine revelation run in the same channel; did not the united voice of apostles and prophets bear the same uniform witness, it would spring out of the very necessity of the case that there can be but one true religion, of which grace is the fountain, the Scriptures the inspired revelation, faith the instrument, God in Christ the Object, the Holy Ghost the worker, godliness the proof, and salvation the end.

But a question may arise in your mind: "Have you no other explanation to give us as to what constitutes true religion? for we are very anxious to know what it is, and, above all, whether we are partakers of it." Let us see then whether an examination of the meaning of the word will give us any help here. What is its literal meaning? for that is a point which may be useful to know. The word "religion" is derived from a Latin word, which signifies to bind, and not merely simply to bind, but to bind fast, or rather to bind again and again by repeated cords. Religion, therefore, properly signifies that strong fastening which binds and binds and binds again, and thus holds fast and firm. It is not indeed a word much used in Scripture, or rather, is not frequently employed by our translators. We find it, however, in Paul's defence of himself, where he says to king Agrippa, "After the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." (Acts 26:5.) There it is applied to false religion; but James uses it to set forth the

true, drawing a distinction between a religion which is "vain" and one which is "pure and undefiled." "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26, 27.) I may observe, however, that the word "religion," as thus used by James, rather means worship, and that his object is not so much to explain what we understand by the word religion, as to show what pure and undefiled worship or service of God consists in,—that he best serves him with a pure conscience and undefiled worship, who manifests his love and affection, sympathy and kindness to Christ's people, by visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping himself unspotted from the world.

But though the word "religion," as used in the Scripture, does not exactly convey the same meaning as I have given it, yet the word of truth is full of that in which the vital essence of all true religion consists, for in fact, all our knowledge of true religion is from the word of God. Its leading idea, as I have already explained, is, that it binds us fast and firm to the throne of God. Thus, we find the apostle speaking: "The love of Christ constraineth us." Was there no binding influence here? Yes; for so powerful was the constraint of this love upon his soul, that he could say, "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." So also, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14.) And again, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count

them but dung, that I may win Christ." (Phil. 3:7, 8.) Do we not see in all these desires and feelings the expression of a binding power upon the heart? We may define religion, therefore, as the effect of that work of grace upon the soul which, as being of the operation of God, has a binding influence, a constraining efficacy upon our heart, upon our lips, and upon our life.

Now, as by faith we stand, by faith we live, by faith we walk, as without faith we can neither please God nor worship him in spirit and in truth, nor know his will, nor do it; as by faith Christ is made precious, his blood and righteousness looked to and embraced; as by faith the heart is purified, the conscience cleansed, and the life regulated; and as all these divine realities have a binding, constraining influence and effect, may we not say that faith is the essence of all true religion, its vital principle, and its grand distinguishing characteristic? Thus there cannot be two kinds of religion because there cannot be two kinds of faith. Have I not already shown you from the word of truth, that as there is but "one God" and "one Lord," so there is but "one faith?" All who are bound as a living sacrifice by the cords of love to the horns of the altar; all who know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; all who worship God in spirit and in truth, must possess one and the same faith, for unless it be a principle of the same origin, producing the same effect, working in the same way, and issuing in the same result, it would not be a religion of which faith is the substance, nor one of which salvation is the end. Does religion, true religion spring then out of a living faith? Then there is only one living faith, and only one true religion as the fruit of that faith. Does true religion consist in having a good hope through grace? Then there can be only one good hope, the "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." As love is a component part of true

religion, one of the cords which bind the soul to the throne of God, there can only be one true love, which is, as the apostle declares, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. As repentance is necessary to salvation, and as Jesus is exalted to give this, there can be but one true repentance, that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of. And so I might run through every grace of the Spirit and show its oneness.

Thus we come to the same point by whatever road we travel to it, that there is and can be but one true religion. There may indeed be as many creeds upon the face of the earth as there are shades of colour amongst its inhabitants; or as many different religions in this country, as there are churches and chapels in the land; but it will be found at the appearing of the Great Judge of all, that there never has been but one way of obtaining eternal life and salvation from the wrath to come. But though religion is the same wherever it exists, it may differ in the variety of expression. It is analogous to what I was endeavouring to show this morning with respect to that one grand thought of God's heart which runs through the whole of his word. I showed you that this thought was but one, and yet that round that one central thought there played a wonderful variety of details, but such a variety as never disagreed or was discordant with the central point which holds it firm in its place. Thus, the religion the Old Testament saints, though the same in substance as ours, differed from it in expression. Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worshipped God by sacrifice. But now to offer a ram upon an altar would be the highest degree of profaneness. After the law was promulgated from Mount Sinai, the godly Israelite carefully and scrupulously attended to the ritual therein prescribed. He practised circumcision; he abstained from unclean meats; he was bound by certain rites and ordinances given by God himself to be observed with the

greatest strictness. For us to do the same things now would be apostasy from Christianity to Judaism. But he was then an accepted worshipper. The expression was different, the mode of worship was not the same; but Abraham's faith was the same as ours; Abraham's hope the same as ours; Abraham's love the same as ours; because Abraham's God is ours. Unless, therefore, you can make out that God may be acceptably worshipped carnally as well as spiritually, believed in acceptably naturally as well as spiritually, you must come to the point with me that there never was and never can be but one religion, and that that must be wrought in the heart by the power of God himself.

This, then, is the reason why the apostle in Hebrews 11. traces out faith in the beautiful and blessed manner he does, as dwelling in the Old Testament worthies, showing that the faith for which he contended, the faith which he preached, the faith which he enjoyed, the faith whereby he was looking to be saved, was exactly the same faith in its nature and substance as the faith of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the faith of Samuel and the prophets; the faith of all the Old Testament believers, who wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy.

These thoughts may lead us to our text; and if the Lord be pleased to open my mouth this evening, may help to cast some light upon it. But you will observe, that the apostle in it is speaking not of the Old Testament believers generally, but of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and especially of Abraham and Sarah. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

I think we may observe four things in the words before us:—

I.—*First*, the *faith* of the persons spoken of.

II.—*Secondly*, the *confession* which they made as springing out of that faith.

III.—*Thirdly*, the *desire* which they had for the better country.

IV.—*Fourthly*, their *death*.

I. I have then to show, with respect to these Old Testament believers, their faith, their confession, their desire, and their death. And if we possess the same faith of which they were the blessed partakers, similar will be our desire, similar will be our confession, and we hope, similar our deaths.

i. The faith of these Old Testament believers in some respects differed from ours. This difference was not in the *faith itself*, for, as I have shown you from the Scripture, there is but "one faith" that, namely, defined by the apostle as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Nor did it differ in the *object* of that faith, for as there is but "one Lord," and he is the object of faith, that object was as much one as the faith itself. The Lord therefore said of Abraham, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56.) Nor did their faith differ from ours in its *operation*, for it was the work of the Holy Spirit, and worked by love. Nor did it differ in its *effects*, which were to purify the heart, separate from the world, and produce the fruits of godliness. Nor did it differ in its *end*, which is the salvation of the soul; for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will sit down in the kingdom of heaven. (1 Pet. 1:9; Matt. 8:11.) If then it did not differ in its nature, in

its object, in its operations, in its effects, or in its end, how did it differ? It differed in this way,—in the distinctness in which the Object of faith was revealed to their spiritual view. We read, therefore, in our text that they did not receive the promises. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." The meaning of this expression is that they did not receive the promises in their fulfilment. They received the promises themselves, that is, by faith, for they were persuaded of them, and embraced them; but they did not receive the fulfilment of the promises as we have received them under the gospel dispensation, since the Lord Jesus, the object of faith, has been revealed in the flesh. We see this very plainly marked in the experience of Simeon, of whom we read that "he was just and devout," that is, a righteous, godly man. He was "waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him." The experience of this godly man represents the experience of the Old Testament saints. He was waiting for that which had to be revealed. We read that "it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." This he saw when he took up the child Jesus in his arms, and blessed God, and said: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." (Luke 2:29.) The experience of Simeon *before* he saw Christ represents the experience and faith of the Old Testament saints; and, the experience of Simeon *after* he had seen Christ, and held him in his arms, represents the experience and faith of New Testament saints since Christ has been revealed in the flesh, and as he is revealed in them by the Spirit.

If you have gathered up my meaning, you will now see what was the faith of these Old Testament believers,—that they looked forward to Christ who was to come, as we look backward upon Christ who is come. With this difference,



however, that the object of their faith not having then been revealed in the flesh, there was a dimness and indistinctness in their faith, corresponding to the distance, so to speak, of the object from their eyes.

ii. But now let us look a little at "the promises" which "they saw afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." I showed you that the persons of whom the apostle is immediately speaking in our text were Abraham and Sarah, together with Isaac and Jacob; for it was of these the apostle says more particularly, "These all died in faith." Now there were certain promises made by God to Abraham; and these promises it may be as well for us to examine. They were chiefly three.

1. The first was that he would be "a God to him and to his seed after him;" and I may add, a covenant God; for the words of the Lord to him were, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." (Gen. 17:7.)

2. The second promise which he gave him was that "He would give the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession." "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Gen. 17:8.)

3. The third promise which he gave him, and which we may well call the sum and substance of the whole was, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3; 22:18.)

These then were the three grand promises which God gave to

Abraham, and they were ratified both to Isaac and Jacob—to Isaac when he was in Gerah (Gen. 26:4), and to Jacob at Bethel, as he lay with his head upon the stone which he had taken for a pillow. (Gen. 28:14.)

But you will observe that neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob "received" any one of these three promises in their complete fulfilment. This is the reason why it is said in our text that "they received not the promises," because they received not the complete fulfilment of them. Though God was their covenant God, yet they did not receive the fulfilment of that promise in all its blessedness; for Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, was not yet come. Canaan was not given into their possession, for they dwelt as sojourners in it, not having a foot of land to call their own, and thus "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country." Nor did they receive the fulfilment of the promise that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, for Messiah was still in the loins of Abraham, and had not yet appeared in the flesh. In this sense, therefore, though they firmly believed the promises made to them and embraced them, they did not receive them in their fulfilment.

iii. But I will now show what they did receive. We read that "they saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them."

You will observe that the apostle does not say promise, but "promises;" and, as I have before shown that their faith was the same as ours, I may add that they saw and received the same promises in their substance that we do.

The promise of the land of Canaan was indeed a special promise to the lineal descendants of Abraham, and therefore does not belong, unless in a spiritual sense, to us Gentiles.

But the two other promises, viz., that God would be a covenant God to him and to his seed, and that in him and in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, stretch beyond the bounds of the children of Abraham after the flesh, and embrace all those who, as being of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham. (Gal. 3:9.) Faith puts us into possession of the promises; for as being the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, all distinctions between Jew and Gentile are put away, and we are all one in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:28, 29.)

Now all these promises are firm and steadfast as being ratified in Christ, for he is not only the sum and substance of them, but they are all established in him, and ratified by him. We therefore read, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." (2 Cor. 1:20.) We have already seen that all the promises belong to those who believe, for they inherit them through faith and patience. But as they are almost innumerable, scattered up and down the word of truth on every side, I can mention only one or two of the most prominent by way of illustration; and in so doing I shall compare their faith in them with what we often see and find now in the experience of believers.

1. The first of these promises is "*eternal life*." "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:2.) We see from these words that it was "promised before the world began;" and was, therefore, couched in the first promise after the fall that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." This was the hope which animated and sustained the faith of Abraham; for we read that "he looked for a city which hath foundations,

whose builder and maker is God;" and so of those in our text it is declared, "But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly." In the faith of this eternal life in the heavenly country they died, for they saw it afar off, were persuaded of it, embraced it, and looking forward to it, "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

2. But as we, as well as they, are poor, vile, and undone sinners by nature and practice, the promise of eternal life is connected with the *pardon of our sins*, the justification of our persons, and our acceptance in the Beloved. It therefore embraces salvation by free, sovereign, distinguishing, and superabounding grace, and every mercy and blessing connected with God's way of salvation.

These promises the Old Testament believers "saw afar off," for eternal life and salvation by grace were not then clearly revealed; and in this dimness of sight many of God's people strongly resemble them.

The first grand promise which they saw afar off, and of which they were persuaded, was *eternal life*. In this point Old Testament believers and New Testament saints are fully agreed. Now, when God by his secret and sacred work on a sinner's conscience is preparing him for the believing reception of these promises, he works in him by his Spirit and grace a faith whereby he is persuaded that these promises were given by God of his own free goodness and mercy, and are blessedly suitable to his state and condition. He thus sees them afar off, in the dim distance, as these pilgrims did. But though these promises are not at first brought blessedly near, but are as yet seen in the dim distance, yet they are sufficiently visible and sufficiently suitable to his state and feelings to attract his thoughts, engage his mind, raise up his faith and hope in them, and

draw forth his affections towards them. Look at a sinner when first convicted of sin. Take your own case and state when first brought under the sentence of condemnation, with a burden of guilt upon your conscience, distress in your mind, and many fears of everlasting perdition pressing down your spirit. What hope or help, strength, wisdom, or righteousness could you find in self? Was not every door barred, every way of escape cut off, every hope resting upon the creature brought to an end? Now, if in this state there were some testimony of Christ given you, some light upon the word, some view of him in the Scriptures, some drawing near of his gracious Majesty, some sweet invitations from his gracious lips dropping into your soul, some kind promise held forth by his hand, was there not in all this testimony as revealed to faith both a sight and an attractive influence? The promises of eternal life and of a full and free salvation might be distant, but a light shone upon them which made them visible. We well know how a gleam of sunlight shining upon a distant spot makes it at once visible; and how different it is, as regards our view of it, when the same spot is covered with clouds and darkness. In this way, the ancient believers saw the promises afar off. Even Abraham himself, though strong in faith, and giving glory to God, saw the day of Christ but afar off, but he rejoiced to see it and was glad. So with you, perhaps, in days gone by. You saw Christ afar off, yet you saw him as truly as if you had seen him near, for it is the same faith by which, as with our natural eye, we see what is afar as what is at hand. But though salvation was seen in him and in no other, it had not yet come nigh; it was in the dim distance, like the jubilee trumpet of which I was speaking this morning; the faint notes were heard before the trumpet itself sounded strong and clear under the walls of the prison where the captive was held in chains. We don't get at Christ in a moment. He will and does reveal himself in his blessed fulness, in his own time and way; but, usually

speaking, we don't get a full manifestation of Christ at first. God's work upon the soul is often very gradual. Faith at first is often very weak, especially as regards taking hold of eternal life; and therefore the hope which springs out of this faith is faint and feeble too. The views of Christ which are entertained by believing hearts in the first stages of Christian experience are usually obscure, and yet they are true as far as they go. Few of the family of God at first are even led into a clear knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel. Legality and self-righteousness darken and confuse their views, and the natural enmity of the human heart against the sovereignty of God is not yet subdued. I have thought sometimes that we often take a wrong view of what may be called a growth in grace; and as on the one hand, we do not make sufficient allowance for the weakness and ignorance of young believers, so on the other, we much forget our own experience and the way in which we ourselves were led. We insist upon a full manifestation of Christ, a gracious revelation of his love and blood, and are too much disposed to think little of, or even to cast aside those minor helps, tokens for good, droppings in of gracious words attended with softenings of heart, meltings of spirit, and gentle intimations of the love of Christ, which in times past were afforded. Because we want something better now, stronger now, clearer now, deeper now; because further and deeper led, more tried and exercised, more acquainted with the evils of our heart, and the snares of sin and Satan, we must not discard things highly prized when it was with us the days of our youth. How highly prized in early days was any view of Christ in the word, anything that testified of him under the preached gospel, any dawning, hope, any moving or melting of heart at his approach, or any springing up of faith to embrace him, with love to flow out toward him. We saw Christ indeed afar off, but so far as we saw him by faith, anchored in him by hope, and embraced him in love, it was

genuine; it was the fruit of the Spirit, it was the effect of grace. And even now may we not say the things we do desire to know, feel, and enjoy, the things which we look unto and look after, and stretch the breathings of our soul unto, are often afar off? We want them near. We would fain enjoy a fuller, clearer, nearer, dearer and more blessed discovery, revelation, and manifestation of the Lord Jesus, and a more powerful application of his blood to our conscience. God still often hides himself. We cannot get near to him as we would. He does not indulge us with those sweet embraces, love kisses, manifestations and revelations of his goodness, love, and mercy which our soul is longing for. So even now, though we may have enjoyed sweet manifestations in times past, and cannot give them up, because to give them up would be to give up our Ebenezers, our testimonies, our standing ground; yet even now we often see the promises afar off. Pardon, and peace and acceptance with God, and everything that our soul is stretching forth its desires after, are often seen but in the dim distance. We just descry the outline, see enough of them to know they are there, and long for a nearer approach, to get a firmer grasp, a fuller discovery and a sweeter manifestation, as knowing that all our salvation is in them and all our dependence upon them; but they are afar off. This, then, is seeing the promises afar off; and thus, in this respect, there is often a similarity between the experience of these Old Testament saints and our own.

iv. But what was the *effect* produced upon their minds by their seeing the promises, though they saw them afar off?

1. The first effect produced was that they "were *persuaded* of them." God the Holy Ghost so convinced them of their truth; he impressed them with such power upon their mind; he sealed them with such firm assurance upon their breast; he

attended the word of promise with such a convincing evidence; he gave such a substance to the promises, and so clothed them with a living reality that they were as if divinely overcome to receive them into their heart as from God. This is the meaning of their being "persuaded of them." There is a sweet persuasion attending the Spirit's work. He does not drive, but draw; does not compel and flog and urge, but gently allures; and his teaching persuades the inmost mind, for it drops like the rain, and distils as the dew, so as to soften the heart, and make a place in it for the word of truth to come and dwell. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." (Col. 3:16.) We read, "God shall enlarge Japheth." (Gen. 9:27.) It is in the margin "persuade." The Hebrew word literally means "to open," and thus corresponds with what is said of Lydia that "the Lord opened her heart unto the things which were spoken of Paul." The heart naturally is barred against God's truth. Unbelief closes every avenue against its reception; but the Lord by opening enlarges the heart to receive his word; and when it is received "not as the word of men but as the word of God," from its coming "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," the heart is persuaded, gently and yet powerfully persuaded of the truth thus effectually made known, and opens itself to all its sweet and blessed influences. Have you not at times been as fully persuaded of the being of the Son of God as if you had seen him with your bodily eye? Have you not been fully persuaded that there was eternal life in him, that there was salvation in his blood, justification by his righteousness, acceptance with God in him? Why else do you believe in his name but from a sweet persuasion that he is the Son of God? Why do you approach him, worship him, adore him, embrace him, cleave to him, and love him, but from an inward persuasion which the Holy Ghost has given you that he is the Son of the Father in truth and love, that he is risen from the dead, and is at God's right



hand, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Whenever a promise has been applied with power to your heart, brought home and sealed with a sweet assurance upon your breast, it created a persuasion not only of its truth but of the certainty of its fulfilment. There may be many difficulties, impediments, obstacles, hindrances, seeming impossibilities in the way of its being fulfilled, but faith, in the language of the hymn—

"Laughs at impossibilities,  
And says, it shall be done."

But let us look at this point more particularly in the case of Abraham, for it is of him mainly and of Sarah that the apostle is speaking in our text. There is this character given of him: "he staggered not at the promises of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Romans 4:20, 21.) You see how this corresponds with the words of our text, the only difference being between "persuaded" and being "fully persuaded," which is merely a difference in degree. It was this full persuasion of the power of God to perform, and of the faithfulness of God to his word of promise to execute which stamped upon the faith of Abraham its distinctive character. A persuasion of these two things is necessary.—1. That God is able; 2, that God is faithful. We therefore read of Sarah's faith that "she judged him faithful who had promised." (Heb. 11:11.) It is this persuasion of the power of God and of the faithfulness of God which makes faith, "the evidence of things not seen;" and as the things promised are always desired and desirable, faith is also "the substance of things hoped for."

Now, if our faith be genuine, as there is but "one faith," it must be the same as the faith of Abraham. We find,

therefore, the apostle speaking: "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:23, 24, 25.) If we are to have the same righteousness imputed to us as was imputed to him, we must have the same faith; and as his faith believed in God as raising up a son from him when dead, so our faith believes on God as raising up Jesus our Lord from the dead. It is alike beautiful and blessed thus to see the similarity of the faith of the saints now with that of Abraham; and if we have but a testimony that we possess that faith for ourselves, what a mercy and favour it will be for us.

v. But now what was the next step taken by those whose experience is recorded in our text?

They "*embraced* them." The word literally means they "saluted" them, that is, they hailed them, welcomed them, threw their arms round them, and as it were affectionately kissed them as guests or friends, whom they gladly received and entertained as dear visitors who had come to see them.

But now comes the question. *How* did they embrace them? I think we shall find that they embraced them chiefly by the exercise of the three grand leading graces in the soul, that is, by faith, and hope, and love.

1. First, then, they embraced theme in *faith*. Is it not by faith, and that of God's giving, that we believe the promises? Is it not by faith that we lay hold of the Son of God, bring him into the heart when he manifests himself, and take hold of his strength that we may have peace with God? Surely faith is first and foremost of the three sisters here, and takes

the lead of them in saluting, welcoming, and embracing such blessed visitors. She is the eldest of the three, and like some elder sisters, almost a mother to the other two; and therefore she goes out first to welcome and entertain in her home and heart, the blessed promises as they come down from heaven, almost as if then were angels of God come to meet her as of old they met Jacob at Mahanaim.

2. But *hope* is not far behind, for she expects and waits for that which faith believes. If faith sees the promises afar off, hope anticipates and waits for their arrival. The word of truth therefore says, "If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Rom. 8:25.) Hope is also compared to an anchor: "Which hope we have, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." As then we embrace the promises we cast anchor in the free grace of God as revealed in them, and especially in him who is the sum and substance of them all,—God's dear Son. The promises afford us blessed anchorage. We may be in storms and tempests; winds and waves may be tossing the ship up and down as on a sea of troubles; and we may be encompassed with thousands of doubts and fears. Now we want both anchor and anchorage. Hope is our anchor, but what is our anchorage? May we not say the promises which are "all yea and amen in Christ Jesus," especially such as, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;" "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The children of God are called "heirs of promise" (Heb. 6:17); and O what a large and abundant inheritance is theirs, for surely the promises with which the word is studded are like the sky, all glowing with stars on a winter night. But observe in what way the promises provide anchorage for a soul that keeps hoping in the Lord. They keep it in some good measure at rest, or at

least from being driven upon the rocks. We see this in the case of David. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Here was hope anchoring in the promises, and looking out for better days with a sweet confidence and blessed expectation that the Lord would appear to the joy of his soul.

3. But they are embraced also in *love*. Though last, this is not the least of the three Christian graces; nay, according to Paul's testimony, she is the greatest of the three. If, then, last, she is only last in starting, but may be first in reaching; as loving John outran believing Peter. (John 20:4.) There is a sweetness in the promises which captivates the heart; a beauty in Christ which wins the soul; a saving unction and power in the word of God when applied, which draws forth toward it every secret and sacred affection. Can you not sometimes look up and say, "Blessed Jesus, I do love thee?" And when the word of God is opened up, applied, and made sweet and precious, have you not felt sometimes as if you could kiss the sacred page, as conveying such sweetness into your soul? This is embracing a promise in love—throwing our arms round it, drawing it near to our breast, kissing it again and again with kisses of love and affection, and taking that sweet delight in it with which the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, as now all his own—at times almost lost, but now wooed and won, no more to be parted. This is rejoicing in the word of God, delighting in a blessed Jesus and in the promises which testify of, and centre in him. Have you not felt these sweet embracements in your soul of the truth as it is in Jesus as so precious, so suitable, so encouraging, and so adapted to every want and woe? then you are a believer; then you are a child of God; then there is a work of grace upon your heart; then you know the truth for yourself by divine teaching and divine testimony. If you have seen the

promises afar off, if you have been persuaded of them by the inward teaching and testimony of God the Holy Ghost, and if you have embraced them in love and affection, you have a testimony that you are one possessed of the faith of God's elect. And yet you may be in a great measure like these ancient worthies. You may not have received the promises in their entire fulfilment. You may still not have had that full deliverance, that blessed revelation, that overpowering manifestation whereby all your doubts and fears have been swept away, and your soul settled in a firm enjoyment of the liberty of the gospel. You may have had it or may have had it not. But if you have this character stamped upon you that you have seen the promises afar off, and been persuaded of them, and embraced them in faith, hope, and love, you have a mark of being a partaker of the faith of God's elect.

II.—But now we come to the *confession* of these ancient pilgrims. Their religion had not only a weight and a power in it, but produced manifest effects. Possessed of a living faith, there were living fruits attending that faith. And we have here a mark which the Holy Ghost has especially given of the reality and genuineness of their faith: "They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

This confession was the peculiar mark of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus we find Abraham speaking to the children of Heth: "I am a stranger and sojourner with you." There he confessed he was a stranger and a pilgrim. When Isaac sent Jacob away to Padan-aram, he prayed that "God would give him the blessing of Abraham, that he might inherit the land where he was a stranger." There Isaac confessed that he was but a stranger on the earth. And when good old Jacob stood before Pharaoh in Egypt, he spoke of "the days and of the years of his pilgrimage." The word "pilgrimage," means, literally, "strangership." Thus Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

confessed with their lips that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

But they confessed it more by their actions than by their words, more by their lives than by their lips. For what was their life? A wandering life. They lived in tents, having no fixed house nor home, not dwelling in cities among the inhabitants of Canaan, but moving from place to place as strangers and sojourners in the land of promise. They confessed therefore, not only with their lips but with their lives, that they were strangers and pilgrims in the land that was given to them for a possession. This is set before us as our exemplar, as what is the characteristic of those possessed of a similar faith. If, then, you possess the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you, like them, confess that you are a stranger; and your confession springs out of a believing heart and a feeling experience. You feel yourself a stranger in this ungodly world; it is not your element, it is not your home. You are in it during God's appointed time, but you wander up and down this world a stranger to its company, a stranger to its maxims, a stranger to its fashions, a stranger to its principles, a stranger to its motives, a stranger to its lusts, its inclinations, and all in which this world moves as in its native element. Grace has separated you by God's distinguishing power, that though you are in the world, you are not of it. You feel, therefore, a stranger here: as David says, "a stranger with thee and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." I can tell you plainly, if you are at home in the world; if the things of time and sense be your element; if you feel one with the company of the world, the maxims of the world, the fashions of the world, and the principles of the world, grace has not reached your heart, the faith of God's elect does not dwell in your bosom. The first effect of grace is to separate. It was so in the case of Abraham. He was called by grace to leave the land of his fathers and go out into a land

that God would show him. And so God's own word to his people is now, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Separation, separation, separation from the world is the grand distinguishing mark of vital godliness. There may be indeed separation of body where there is no separation of heart. But what I mean is, separation of heart, separation of principle, separation of affection, separation of spirit. And if grace has touched your heart and you are a partaker of the faith of God's elect, you are a stranger in the world, and will make it manifest by your life and conduct that you are such.

But they were "pilgrims," that is, sojourners through weary deserts, longing, longing for home, possessing nothing in which they could take pleasure, feeling the weariness of a long travel and anxious for rest. Are you not sometimes almost worn out by sin and self, trials, temptations, and afflictions, so that you would fain lay down your weary body in the grave, that your soul might rest in the sweet enjoyment of the King of kings and the Lord of lords? If such be our spirit, we have something of the spirit of the pilgrim sojourning in a weary land and longing for rest, happiness, and peace in a better country.

III.—But now comes their *desire*: "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country," or, as we read in almost the next verse, "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly."

Wherever there is faith there is desire; and as faith embraces heavenly realities, desire embraces that of which faith testifies. The promises of which I have spoken, all centre in Christ Jesus. They are all connected with his Person and

work, death and resurrection, and what he now is at the right hand of God. And as they all centre in him, so they all testify of him and come from him. It is this which gives them their suitability and invests them with their peculiar sweetness and power. Now, as the soul is wrought upon by a divine power, and faith is drawn forth into blessed exercise upon the promises of which it is persuaded and which it embraces, desire is kindled for their enjoyment. Religion is not a burdensome, painful, melancholy, wearisome, and toilsome task or employment as many think. It has indeed its trials, temptations, afflictions, cutting griefs, and depressing sorrows; but it has its sweetness, its peace, its delights, and its enjoyments. And it is the sweetness that we feel, the enjoyment that we have, and the delighting ourselves in the things of God, which hold our head up and encourage us still to persevere and travel on through the wilderness. It is not all bondage, nor distress of mind, nor sorrow of heart, nor perplexity of soul which the heirs of promise feel. There are sips and tastes, drops and crumbs, and momentary enjoyments, if not long nor lasting, yet sweet when they come, sweet while they last, and sweet in the recollection when they are gone. The Lord gives that which encourages, strengthens, comforts, and delights, and enables us to see that there is that beauty, blessedness, and glory in him which we have tasted, felt, and handled, and which we would not part with for a thousand worlds.

Now this is what they sought in desiring a heavenly country. They wanted something heavenly, something that tasted of God, savoured of God, smelt of God, and was given of God; a heavenly religion, a spiritual faith, a gracious hope, and a love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; something which came from heaven and led to heaven; which gave heavenly feelings, heavenly sensations, heavenly delights, and heavenly joys, whereby the heart was purified from the



love of sin, carnality, and worldliness, by having something sweeter to taste, better to love, and more holy to enjoy. It is these heavenly visitations, droppings in of the favour, goodness, and mercy of God, which keep the soul alive in its many deaths, sweeten it amidst its many bitters, hold it up amidst its many sinkings, and keep it from being drowned whilst conflicting with many waters. A carnal mind has no taste for heavenly things, no sweet delight in the word of God; no delight in the Lord Jesus as revealing himself in the word; no delight in closet duties, secret meditation, searching the Scriptures, communion with God, or even in the company of God's dear family. There must be a heavenly element in the soul to understand, realise, enjoy, and delight in heavenly things. The Holy Ghost must have wrought in us a new heart, a new nature, capable of understanding, enjoying, and delighting in heavenly realities, as containing in them that which is sweet and precious to the soul. They desired, therefore, a better country, that is, a heavenly, a city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; where pleasures are at God's right hand for evermore; where the pure river of the water of life ever flows; where the tree grows on which are found leaves for the healing of the nations; such a city as John describes in the Book of Revelation, where all is happiness, harmony, and peace.

IV.—Now what was their end? *How did they die?* "These all died in faith." When death came it did not rob them of their faith. They held with their believing hand in death every truth which they had held with their believing hand in life. It is in death that the gospel is such a blessing when held by a believing hand. What should we do upon a dying bed, with all our sins staring us in the face in all their awful magnitude, accused by Satan, condemned by conscience, terrified by a holy law, and frowned upon by an indignant God? What must be our end upon the bed of death if we had nothing to look to

but a God who is a consuming fire, with nothing but the bitter recollection of past sins to agonise the mind and distress the conscience? O, if ever faith is needed, it will be needed then; if ever the gospel embraced, embraced then; if ever Christ looked to, looked to then; if ever laid hold of by the hand of faith, laid hold of then. "These all died in faith." They had not received the fulfilment of the promises; they looked forward to the full enjoyment of them in another life. They had received enough to give them faith, received enough to communicate a good hope, received enough to make Christ precious to their soul, received enough to make them know what faith was, and to live and die in the exercise of it. Now, if you know what faith is, and your faith has embraced the Son of God, and love has worked by that faith, and Christ in that faith has made himself precious, that faith will never give up the ghost in a dying hour. False faith will then expire; but the faith of God's elect, the faith I have described this evening, will not leave you in the hour of death, but support you as you pass through the dark valley, and land you safe on that happy shore where faith is turned into sight, hope into enjoyment, and love abides in its fullest manifestation.

Now, do you think you can take your experience, and your life in conjunction with your experience, and lay them down side by side with this? God has not written this for our amusement or entertainment, or to listen to for an hour as a text on which to found a discourse. The Holy Ghost has written this for our instruction and edification, that we may take it home to our breast, bring our experience to the light of it, and see how it stands the searching testimony. I have not set up this evening a very deep, or very great, or very high experience. I have simply set before you what God the Holy Ghost has laid down in the words from which I have spoken, described therein the faith of God's ancient saints,

and shown, as far as the Lord has given me strength and ability, what that same faith is now in its operations in God's elect. If you have the same faith, it will have the same effect upon you; it will embrace the same Object, create the same hope, communicate the same love, and work in you the same upright, godly, and consistent practice.