

## The Righteous and Their Blessings

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Oct. 3, 1858

"But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him." Psalm 37:39, 40.

Viewed by the natural eye, human society is made up of a vast number and an almost infinite variety of ranks and conditions. From the Sovereign on the throne to the pauper in the Union, society in this sense may be compared to a vast chain uniting two distant points, every link of which is necessary to the continuity of the whole. Some of the links may be large and others small—some strong and others weak—some of gold and others of iron—some highly polished and others worn and rusty; but each occupies a fixed position in the chain; and if one of the weakest and worst break or give way, the fracture destroys the connexion of the whole as much as if the strongest were to fail. Or to vary the figure, human society may be compared to an arch, in which every stone occupies a certain place, and is kept in its position by the key-stone, which drops into the centre and binds the whole fabric firmly together. The smaller links in the chain, if they could find a tongue, might sometimes complain how weak they are; but they determine the strength of the chain, for however closely wrought or massive it be, it cannot be stronger than its weakest link. Or the lower stones of the arch might murmur their indignation against the great weight that has been laid upon them; but if they sustain the greater pressure, they support more strongly and firmly thereby the whole arch, and thus occupy the most important and honourable position of the whole structure. In society, there

always will, there always must be rich and poor; and the rich can no more do without the poor than the poor can do without the rich. Without the poor, where would be labour? And without labour, where would be food or shelter, raiment or fuel, house or home, or the commonest necessaries of life? We should all die of cold and starvation were there no poor to labour for us in the field and in the mine, at the forge, the bench, and the loom. And without the rich, how could the poor get wages to pay them for their labour and to provide themselves with food? So that capital and labour—the employer and the employed—the food consumer and the food producer; in other words, the rich and the poor, are indispensable to each other's well being. I drop these hints to show how foolish it is, as well as how sinful, for the poor to dislike the rich, and for the rich to despise the poor, when neither can exist without the other.

But when we view the present scene with a spiritual eye, and leave out of consideration that wondrous frame of human society which God has constituted with as much wisdom as the glorious sun over our head, or the fair creation with all its marvels under our feet, we see that men really are to be divided into only two classes: the righteous and the wicked—those who fear God and those who fear him not—those who are walking in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life, and those who are travelling down the broad road that leads to eternal destruction. If you are an attentive reader of God's word, it cannot have escaped your observation how much the Scripture speaks of "the righteous." In fact, we can scarcely open our Bibles without seeing them named in almost every page—their character described, their blessedness declared, and the most gracious promises pronounced on their behalf. It is of these "righteous" that our text speaks; and salvation, strength, help, and deliverance are declared to be their peculiar

privilege and portion. In opening up these words, I shall, therefore, with God's blessing, endeavour:

I.—*First*, to show who "*the righteous*" are, and how *their salvation is of the Lord*.

II.—*Secondly*, that these righteous ones will and must have their "*time of trouble*;" but that in that time of trouble, the Lord will prove *their strength, will help them, deliver them, and save them*.

III.—*Thirdly*, why the Lord will do all these things unto them: "*because they trust in him*."

I.—It is evident, from God's own testimony, that since the fall of man, none by nature are righteous in such a sense as the Scripture declares the saints of God to be. For let us bear in mind that in order to judge rightly of spiritual things, we must measure them not by a natural, but by a spiritual standard; and where shall we find that but in the inspired Scriptures? Suppose, for instance, that two surveyors are fixed upon to measure and value a certain building; and the tape or measuring rod of the one is marked right, and the other, through fraud or inadvertence, is marked wrong: how can they agree in the sum total of the measurement? Now if a dispute arise in consequence as to which is the correct measurement, what is to be done but to examine the two measures and abide by that which is the right one? Or if in the sale of an article the buyer weighs with one set of scales and weights and the seller with another, the one being true and the other false, how are these two men to come to any agreement with regard to the real weight of the article; and how is it to be decided according to truth and justice, except by putting it into fair scales against honest weights? So if men measure the righteous by any other than God's

measure; or if they weigh them by any other scales or weights than those of the sanctuary, how can God and men agree in their judgment who the righteous are any more than those of whom I have been speaking in figure? It is for this reason—that his scales and weights are all wrong, that the judgment of man who "the righteous" are differs so widely from the judgment of God. But need I ask you whose judgment is right and whose is wrong—whose word shall stand, God's or theirs? (Jer. 44:28.) Immediately, therefore, that a man, through ignorance or prejudice, sets aside the judgment of God and follows his own, he commits a mistake, and if not rectified by the grace of God, as far as he himself is concerned, a fatal one. The standard whereby man weighs himself or others is and must be necessarily defective, for he can merely view certain acts which he considers acts of righteousness. Man cannot read human hearts; he cannot enter into the springs of action, nor pierce into those hidden motives which give the real complexion to acts and determine their true character as good or evil; still less has he any view of the purity and holiness of him who is a consuming fire, nor is he acquainted with the breadth, spirituality, and strictness of God's righteous law, which declares an angry word to be murder, and an unchaste glance to be adultery. He therefore weighs men's acts in a corrupt balance, and measures lips and lives by a faulty standard; so that when he says—"These men are righteous: for they speak righteous words, they do righteous acts"—he, having no right means of determining, can pronounce no right judgment either upon men or their acts. To set aside the Bible or mistake its meaning is like a judge coming on circuit and deciding cases, not according to the law of the land, or the verdict of the jury, but according to his own prejudices or his own interest. But God, the supreme, the righteous, the unerring judge of all the earth, looking down from heaven upon the hearts and actions of men, has

already pronounced the sentence with his own infallible lips. And this is his decision:—"There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10, 11, 12.) If, then, we accept (and how, if taught by his Spirit, can we do otherwise?) God's judgment and not man's; if we are determined, as obedient children, to abide by the declaration of him who cannot lie, and to disregard the vain imaginations and lying deceits of a heart too deeply sunk in darkness to see, too deeply buried in sin to feel its own ignorance and its own alienation from God, we shall believe that to be true of all which we know, from experience, to be true of ourselves, that "there is none righteous, no, not one."

And yet the word of truth—and our text is but one voice among hundreds—speaks of "the righteous" over and over again. But how can this be, if there are "none righteous;" and have we not, by rashly running down human nature, entangled ourselves here in a noose from which we cannot escape? This, then, is the enigma which we have to solve—this the knot which we have to untie; and I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to solve this enigma and to untie this knot—not by logical skill, or by sophistical argument, as if I wished to establish my own views, right or wrong, but by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the word of truth and in the hearts of all who fear and love his great Name.

i. As God has declared that there are "righteous" people on earth, we may start from that point as a settled question. But as he has also declared that there is "none righteous," we must come to this conclusion, that either the word of God contradicts itself, saying and unsaying in the same breath—(awful conclusion to come to!)—or that there are those who

in one sense are righteous and in another not. In fact that is just the solution of the whole enigma—that the righteous are unrighteous in themselves, but righteous in Christ. But this simple statement will not suffice. A fuller explanation is needed. When, where, and how do they become righteous?

1. To understand this more clearly, we must run our thoughts back into a past eternity; for we must not view God as resembling ourselves, the being of a day, ever changing and ever changeable, resolving and breaking resolves, having no fixed purposes or eternal will, but viewing men and things with the eyes of time and waiting for events to happen. We must view him as he has declared himself to be, unchanging and unchangeable. "I am the Lord; I change not" (Mal. 3:6); "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.) In God's own eternal mind, therefore, and unchangeable purpose, the righteous were always righteous, and this not by any foreseen goodness of their own, but in consequence of their union with, and standing in, the Lord Jesus Christ as their covenant Head. Thus, as *viewed in eternal union with the Son of God*, they are righteous as partaking of his righteousness; for as is the head so are the members—the church of Christ never having any standing distinct from her Lord and Head. You cannot separate the vine from the branches, or the husband from the wife. You cannot dislodge the corner-stone from the building reared upon and united unto it. The vine would cease to be the vine without branches; the husband would be no husband without the wife; and the foundation would be incomplete without the superstructure. In this sense, then, from all eternity the people of God were righteous in Christ, because they were viewed in the mind of him who cannot change as for ever and unalterably one with the Lord the Lamb. In this sense they are righteous in his righteousness, holy in his holiness, and comely in his comeliness; so that he

could say of and to his beloved Bride in their eternal betrothal—"Thou art all fair, my love there is no spot in thee." (Song 4:7.)

2. We now come down to the creation of man, which was the first bringing of these hidden purposes to light; when God made our first parent in his own image, after his own likeness. But the fall broke in. Our first parent did not continue to stand in that uprightness in which he was created. An awful catastrophe took place—one evidently by God's permission, but not by God's cooperation. God had no hand in it, though not unforeseen or unprovided against; but in his infinite wisdom and for the manifestation of his own grace and glory, he left Adam to stand or fall in the strength that he naturally possessed when he came fresh from his divine Creator's hand. We, my friends, and all the race of mankind were in Adam's loins when that fearful fall took place. Just as Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchisedec met him, and paid tithes in him (Heb. 7:9), so were we in the loins of Adam when Satan met him and overthrew him; and we therefore fell with him. Adam was our natural covenant head, and thus his acts were our acts; for the head and members stand together in that intimate union and relationship that what benefits the head benefits the members and what injures the head injures the members. This Adam well knew, for he was told before the fall to "increase and multiply;" and therefore he was warned that an innumerable offspring was in his loins, that he stood as their covenant head, and that if he fell, he was consigning not only himself, but unborn millions to death and ruin. The woman was deceived, but Adam was not (1 Tim. 2:14); and this made his sin so heinous, that he sinned wilfully and deliberately, and well knowing the awful consequences. From him we have all sprung by lineal descent. We are therefore not only involved in his sin, but tainted by his corruption.

Thus we are doubly sinners—sinners by partaking of his sin in the actual commission of it in Paradise, and sinners by the transmission of his corrupt nature in which he begat all his children, and which we inherit from him. Thus all are by nature children of wrath, for "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22); and "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that ("in whom" margin) all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12.) In this sense, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23.) Measured, then, by the law of God, no man is or can be righteous; for the description that the prophet gives of Zion in his day is true of us—"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." Many think we take a pleasure in magnifying and exaggerating the fall of man—that we gloat over his corruptions, and instead of decently covering, rudely and rashly lay bare his sores. But where can we find language stronger than Paul's description of the sins of the Gentile world in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and of the abominations of the Jewish world in the second? And what conclusion does he draw from both but this, that "every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may become guilty before God?" (Rom. 3:19.)

Now the Lord the Spirit makes all the family of God feel this by bringing home the law in its breadth, spirituality, and curse into their conscience, that they may experimentally learn their guilt, and their mouth be effectually stopped from uttering a word in self-justification. Who that has the fear of God can appeal against the verdict of his own conscience? For the law not only condemns actions, but words and thoughts. It requires an unswerving obedience, makes no allowance for human infirmity, but takes, as it were, the sinner by the throat and says—"Pay me that thou owest. And



the debt thou owest me, and every farthing of which thou shalt pay, is perfect, unswerving love to God, for he commandeth thee to love him with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; and thorough, unwavering love to man, for 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' And if thou do not love God and man; with this perfect love—if thou fail at any time or in any way in the feeling or in the action—if thou have but one murderous thought or unchaste desire; and if in a moment of weakness or temptation, thou break it and thus offend in one point, thou art guilty of all. (James 2:10.) There is then no mercy in the law for thee; to hell thou must go with all thy sins upon thine head." Now who can stand before this fiery law? The children of Israel, when the law was proclaimed from Mount Sinai, begged that they might hear those terrible words no more—words which, with all their fearful accompaniments of blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet piercing ear and heart with its shrill notes, as blown by angels' breath, struck awe and terror into the stoutest consciences. Now when this same law enters the conscience of a sinner with divine power, it lays him in the dust guilty before God; it cuts him up root and branch; for it not only condemns outward sin, but as a two-edged sword is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12); and thus turning all his comeliness into corruption, shows him and makes him to feel that there is nothing in him but sin and corruption from head to foot. It thus strips him of all creature righteousness, so that he falls before God with his mouth in the dust, crying out—"Behold, I am vile."

But how can this be a righteous man? He cannot of himself, as he would freely tell you; but he can be made one, and that in a moment, not only before God, but in his own faith and feeling. When, then, he is in this state—with only a step, it may be, between him and death—without hope, without

help, without strength, without wisdom, without righteousness in himself,—if there be but given a blessed revelation to his soul of the Person, blood, and righteousness of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, and he be enabled to stretch forth his hand to put on this robe of righteousness, and freely accept what God freely gives—pardon, peace, and salvation through the Son of his love—then he is justified in his own conscience; then he stands not only a righteous man before God, but by receiving the atonement (Rom. 5:11), and being clothed with the garments of salvation, and covered with the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10), he becomes a righteous man in his own feelings, in the enjoyment and experience of his *free and full justification from the curse of the law and the wrath of God* due to his transgressions.

3. But there is also another sense in which the children of God are righteous; and that is, by *the implantation in their bosom of a righteous nature*, which, as being born of God, is as pure as God is pure and as holy as he is holy. For this reason we are said to be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), and to "put on the new man which after God [i.e., after the image of God] is created"—it being a divine and new creation, "in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:24.) This pure and holy nature, John tells us, cannot sin, because it is born of God (1 John 3:9), and is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes the soul free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2), being that kingdom of God in the heart which is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17.) This is an *imparted* righteousness, and its very essence is that sweet spirituality of mind which is life and peace, and that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. (Rom. 8:6; Heb. 12:14.)

4. But there is still another sense in which the saints of God

are righteous; which is by *producing fruits of righteousness*, those good works unto which they are created, and which God hath before ordained that they should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10.) Let no man think that this is a small or unimportant matter, and that it is of little consequence how a man lives so long as he believes. It is not those who say Lord, Lord, that enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of God. (Matt. 7:21.) The end of every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is to be "hewn down and to be cast into the fire." (Matt. 3:10.) But the saints of the Most High are not "trees whose fruit withereth, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (Jude 12), "but trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that he might be glorified." But do not other men perform righteous actions? No; because they are not done from righteous principles nor to righteous ends. Do not motives much decide the true nature of actions? Take this case. Two persons visit the same individual—say some poor sick widow—to condole with her and relieve her temporal wants. The heart of the one is touched with compassion and sympathy, and, weeping for and with her, he seeks by every means to soothe her sorrows, and before he leaves ministers of his substance to her necessities. The other, out of mere ostentation or as an act of duty, pays his visit more as a relieving officer or a parish overseer than a sympathising friend, and, after a few dry, cold, hard words about the duty of submission, puts into her hand, being well able to afford it, double the amount that the other gave her. Now would you say that these two men did an equally good action, or that he who gave double did twice as good a work as the other? Though outwardly they do the same act, you decide upon the relative goodness of it by scrutinising the motive; and if you can thus exercise your judgment upon what is and what is not a morally good action, how much more shall the all-seeing Majesty of Heaven judge what is or is not a spiritually good action! The

good works, then, of natural men are not righteous actions, because they are not of the Spirit, nor done with an eye to the glory of God, nor renounced by the doer as meritorious. Did not the widow's mite outweigh in value all the other gifts cast into the treasury? Righteous actions can only be performed by righteous men. The tree must be made good before the fruit can be good. The good acts then of the saint of God, done under the influence of the Holy Spirit, are righteous acts, because they spring from a righteous principle and are done to a righteous end—the honour and glory of a righteous God.

We seem, then, brought to this conclusion, that those who know, fear, and love God, are righteous in four different ways. They are righteous as being eternally justified in the Lord the Lamb; they are righteous as being clothed with the imputed righteousness of the Son of God; they are righteous as possessing an imparted righteousness, the new man of grace; and they are righteous in their life and conversation, by performing acts of righteousness.

ii. But I pass on to show *how the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord*. Though they are righteous in the sense I have pointed out, they cannot save themselves, wholly or in part. They have, in fact, no hand in their own salvation. The whole is of grace from first to last. They may hinder, but they cannot help; nor can they produce anything out of their hearts or in their lives available for their own salvation or that of others. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious"—so precious that nothing but the blood of Christ can effect it, and, as regards all human exertions, without this, "it ceaseth for ever." (Psalm 49:7, 8.) Look at the several ways in which I have shown that the saints of God are righteous, and see what you

can find of self in any. Did they plead their cause with God before the world had birth or being, and ask him to give them a name and a place in the Book of Life, when time itself had no existence? Where were they when the foundations of the earth were laid, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:7.) We can no more think that the members of the mystical body of Christ united themselves to him, their head, than we can think the members of our natural body put themselves in their present place by an act of their own will. They could not, therefore, be righteous in that sense. Nor could they be righteous by working out a perfect obedience to God's holy law, for they had lost all power, through the fall, to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Nor could they produce any internal fruits of righteousness such as a heart-searching God can accept, for since the fall every imagination of man's heart is only evil continually. It is like a gutter running down the street. You may try if the water be drinkable, but glass after glass will have to be thrown away. Thus it is with the heart of man. Thought after thought, desire after desire, and imagination after imagination, are all equally corrupt; nor can the water thus polluted at the fountain head run itself sweet, but will ever cast forth its wickedness from its natural inherent sinfulness. Nor again can they without grace perform acts of righteousness. As, therefore, without righteousness there is no salvation, and they have no righteousness of their own, their righteousness must be from God. And is not this his own declaration—"Their righteousness is of me," saith the Lord? (Isa. 54:17.)

But *how* is the salvation of the righteous of the Lord? 1. First, in its eternal *contrivance*. O what a contrivance was the way of salvation! How it would have tasked the utmost skill and wisdom of angelic minds, had the Lord set the brightest seraphim to devise how sinful man might be saved and yet

God's honour and justice be preserved intact. All the celestial hierarchy might have consulted among themselves to all eternity, but none could have solved the problem. Had they been so far moved by compassion as to feel a desire, "Lord, pity poor man! Think of that terrible hell to which he is hastening!" would not a sense of his eternal justice and infinite holiness have arrested the thought before it passed out of their lips? How could the highest angelic intellect imagine a way whereby mercy might be shown and yet justice not suffer? They had seen their fellow-angels hurled from heaven's battlements into the burning lake. Why should not sinning man suffer the same punishment as sinning angels? That the mysteries of redeeming love surpass in themselves the comprehension of angels is plain from the words of the apostle—"Which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:12); and yet they are ever learning in it new lessons of the wisdom of God, as the apostle tells us—"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." (Eph. 3:10.) Shall I say too much if I express the thought that to harmonise justice and mercy drew on the utmost resources of the divine mind? At least Scripture bears me out in declaring that the Person and work of the God-Man is the most eminent display of divine wisdom that could be manifested, as the apostle cries out in an ecstasy of admiration, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." (Rom. 11:33.) That God's co-equal and co-eternal Son should take into union with his own divine Person a pure humanity, conceived under the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and in that pure humanity should suffer, bleed, and die; by that one offering of his sacred body and soul should put away sin, and by his active and passive obedience work out and bring in a righteousness in which millions of ruined sinners might stand accepted in the beloved; and yet that every attribute

of God should thereby be fully harmonised and eternally glorified,—surely this contrivance is worthy of the infinite wisdom of God. In this sense, then, may we say that the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord.

2. But having looked at the contrivance, let us view it in its *accomplishment*. How the eye of faith follows not only the plan but the execution? How it sees the Son of God taking flesh into union with his divine Person in the womb of the Virgin Mary; how it views him a babe in Bethlehem's manger; then a child growing up in wisdom and stature. How it follows him all through the course of his holy, innocent life, until it comes to the garden of Gethsemane, where it views him sweating great drops of blood and groaning under the wrath of God. How thence the believing eye accompanies the blessed Redeemer to the cross of Calvary, and there sees the suffering Son of God bathed in blood—the sun hiding his light, the earth quaking to its very centre, tombs opening and giving up their dead, until his expiring voice sounds forth the words "It is finished," and the Holy Lamb of God bows his head and gives up the ghost. O, truly, truly, when we gaze upon the sight, and see the suffering son of God—when we view by the eye of faith those precious drops of blood which fell from the Redeemer's thorn-crowned brow and pierced hands and feet and side, well may we say, "Here is pardon; here is righteousness; here is salvation." Where, O where, can we find any other. Is not this salvation in its full accomplishment? Is not this a finished work?

3. But is there not something still beyond this? Yes, there is. There is salvation in its *application*, in its realisation and enjoyment. The salvation, which is of God the Father's eternal contrivance, and God the Son's full accomplishment, needs God the Holy Ghost's divine application; for salvation is to be enjoyed in the heart by being personally applied to

the conscience. How ever a trembling sinner may feel his shame and nakedness, he cannot stretch forth his hand and take the robe as his own; he cannot by an act of faith bring before his eyes the atoning blood, or sprinkle it upon his conscience. As it was Moses who sprinkled the blood upon the people—not the people upon themselves; as it was the father who brought forth the best robe—not the returning prodigal breaking into his father's wardrobe: so it is the Holy Ghost who sprinkles the blood of Jesus upon the conscience, and clothes the soul with his salvation. Thus the church exults—"He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." (Isaiah 61:10.) In this way salvation is known to be of the Lord by divine manifestation and in personal experience.

And O, what a salvation must that be which is wholly his! What beauty and glory do we see stamped upon the works of God's hand in creation! I have sometimes thought that God has scattered beauty upon the face of creation, if I may so speak, from his very finger tips! The butterflies that flit to and fro in the summer's sun, the birds that skim through the air, the shells which strew the floors of ocean, and the flowers which adorn garden and field,—how beauty is stamped upon them all; as if even the outer court of creation, the very precincts of the king's palace, must be beautiful; as issuing from the mind, and called into being by the voice of the King in his beauty. For if heaven is his throne, earth is his footstool, and beautiful because his foot rests upon it. But in salvation, how the beauty, grace, and glory of God pre-eminently shine forth! How all things in creation fall short of the beauty of a suffering Mediator—of the grace of the bleeding Lamb—of the glory of salvation as revealing mercy without trespassing on the demands of



justice. Where else can we find a salvation which at once glorifies God and saves man; which harmonises all the perfections of Jehovah, and crowns Jesus Lord of all? Truly, then, we may say, "the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord." Nor do I believe that you are a righteous person unless you can say "Amen! amen! salvation is of the Lord! I believe it, I know it, I feel it." But you may have learnt it where Jonah went to learn it, in the very "belly of hell," for there Jonah felt that salvation is of the Lord. Or if more gently handled and taught in less severe a school, you have still seen and felt enough of misery and mercy, malady and remedy, law and gospel, to know that salvation is of the Lord. This salvation may not have reached your heart with all that sweet power and full assurance that you may desire; you may still have doubts and fears as to your interest therein; but from a pressing sense of need, and sips and tastes that the Lord is gracious, you receive with hearty approbation the blessed truth that salvation is of the Lord. You are very sure that salvation is not in yourself; and if not in yourself, where can you look for it except in the Lord? Look up, therefore, doubting, trembling saint of God, and see the salvation of the Lord! Look up and see the blessed Jesus at the right hand of the Father, who has saved thy soul by his own precious blood, and given thee some pledge and earnest of it, and believe, as God may enable thee, that salvation is of the Lord, and that thou, even thou, hast an interest therein! This, of which thou hast already the foretaste in hope and the earnest in hand, will, when more clearly and fully manifested, gladden thy heart, remove every guilty fear, support thee in every trial, comfort thee on the bed of languishing and pain, bear thee through the dark valley, and land thy happy soul in a blissful eternity.

II.—But this leads me to show that the righteous have their *times of trouble*; for they have to prove in the path of

tribulation what the Lord is to them. We are not carried to heaven in a coach and four. We are not borne upon men's shoulders in a palanquin and taken into the blissful presence of God in a sleep, without any concern or anxiety, trouble or sorrow. There is "a time of trouble" for all the saints of God; and it is in this time of trouble that they learn that salvation is of the Lord, and what the Lord their salvation is to their souls.

1. The first time of spiritual trouble which the Lord's people experience is when God *pricks their conscience by a convincing word*—when he applies the keen edge of his two-edged sword to their heart, and sends the sentence of the law into their conscience. This is the time of Jacob's trouble, of which we read that "none is like it." (Jer. 30:7.) I do not mean that all the quickened family of God are pierced with equal depth and poignancy of conviction; but the wound must be deep and powerful enough to kill. A death and a resurrection must take place in the soul as well as in the body. This death may be a sudden stroke, or the effect of prolonged disease. In dying literally, there may be the sudden stroke of fever, or a lengthened paralysis; a severe and agonising but short illness, or a long, lingering consumption equally brings the body to the house appointed to all living. So all must die under the law and to their own righteousness; but whether they die quickly or slowly—be the wound in the first instance very deep or less severe, it is a time of trouble to all the saints of God.

But the Lord, we read in our text, "*will be their strength*" in the time of trouble. When you were first called by grace, you would have sunk into despair, unless the Lord had been pleased secretly to support your soul. His support is an invisible support. Did not the Lord, when he was first pleased to awaken your soul, give you strength in that time of

trouble? You knew not before what the strength of God was; but he strengthened you to cry and pray to him for mercy; to believe that in his own time he would appear; to wait for that time, and not outrun or fall behind it. But for his strength thus secretly put forth, where would your guilty soul have been now?

Besides which, according to our text, *he helped* you; he gave you some little assistance. He helped you by a soft sustaining word to hope in his mercy—to lie at his feet till deliverance came—to seek for it in the appointed way—to read the word with some spiritual understanding—to hear the truth with some softness and brokenness of feeling—to call upon his name with some earnestness and power—to unbosom your heart with some freedom of access. He helped you to look unto the Son of his love, as one from whom, and from whom alone all your salvation could come, and to refuse all comfort from any other hand. So that now, looking back upon this time of trouble, you can see—though you could not perceive it then—that the Lord was your secret strength and help, and worked in you in a manner you did not then understand, but which you can now more clearly and plainly distinguish.

2. But there is another *time of trouble*, when the Lord is pleased to open up more fully and thoroughly the fountains of the great deep, and to lay bare the secrets of the Adam-fall. We do not usually know this in the first teachings of God in our soul. We see the evil of sin, but are unacquainted for the most part with the evil of the heart. We see the streams, but not the fountain; we taste the fruits, but know not the root that bears the stem which brings them forth. But after a time, when we have been favoured with some little deliverance, the Lord leads us into the chambers of imagery and shows us what we are in the Adam-fall. This is indeed the time of trouble. When you see and feel nothing in your

heart but sin and wickedness; when you would be holy, but find that you cannot be so; when little else but filth, pride, uncleanness, and rebellion are at work in your carnal mind,—all this brings with it a time of trouble, for you are dismayed at the discovery of the deep and foul abyss which God has lain open within by the light of his Spirit.

3. It is also a time of trouble, when *the Lord*, who has revealed himself to your soul, *begins to hide his face*; when you doubt and fear that all is a delusion—that your faith is wrong from the beginning—that the work upon your soul was not really the Lord's—that you have been deceiving yourself, the people of God, and the minister to whom you have told your experience. You fear that you have been deceived, that all is a delusion, and that you have added to the rest of your sins the daring crime of hypocrisy.

4. Another time of trouble is when *temptation besets you sore*—when Satan riddles you, as it were, to and fro in his sieve as he riddled Peter (Luke 22:31); and so much falls through the meshes that only a few grains of grace, which the Lord has lodged by his own Spirit in your heart, seem to remain. When you are put into the furnace to endure that fiery trial which shall try every man's work of what sort it is; or are in deep mire where there is no standing; or are struggling against the waves and billows that seem bursting over your head, until you are afraid that you shall say or do some dreadful thing which will plainly prove you to be the enemy of God, and given up by him to destruction of body and soul,—this is indeed a time of trouble.

5. Or, as the afflictions of the righteous are many, and we can lay down no certain path of suffering, you may be called upon to pass through *heavy trials in providence*—bereavements of wife or child, or painful and peculiar family

troubles, which may wound and lacerate your warmest affections and tenderest feelings. All the family of God have their allotted number and measure of griefs and sorrows, which, as they come upon them, form "times of trouble" which, with all our other times, are in the hands of the Lord (Psalm 31:15), and are dealt out by him with unerring wisdom and most faithful love.

Now these times of trouble try the saint of God, and they are meant to do so: that is the very purpose why they are sent, for "the Lord trieth the righteous." Still the promise holds good: "he is *their strength* in the time of trouble." When he breaks up the fountains of the great deep of sin and iniquity, he strengthens his people that they may not be carried away by the flood. When he hides his face, he strengthens them to say—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." When temptation besets them sore—when they are put into the furnace, the Lord is with them there, as he was with the three men whom Nebuchadnezzar cast in. The Son of God is there with them, so that not a hair of their head is singed, nor the smell of fire cast upon them. (Dan. 3:27.) In all their afflictions he is afflicted, and by sharing it with them supports them under it. He is thus their strength; for he strengthens them with strength in their soul. He enables them to bear the weighty cross—to sustain the heavy load of trial and affliction—to put their mouth in the dust as needing and deserving his chastising strokes, and submit to his righteous dispensations and dealings as plainly sent by a gracious and loving hand. And ever and anon he drops in a sustaining word, gives an encouraging look, bestows a soft and healing touch, and thus helps them to wait in faith and hope until in due time he sends full deliverance. Thus he helps and delivers, and will do so in every time of trouble down to their dying bed, when he will give them their full and final deliverance from the body of sin and death and a world

full of iniquity and sorrow.

O what a blessed inheritance is the inheritance of the righteous! Not only is their salvation from first to last of the Lord, but he continually helps and delivers them; yea, "*he delivers them from the wicked,*" from their ungodly persecutors, their malicious foes, and all who hate them, because they love and follow Jesus. O the blessedness of the righteous! You may be very poor in this life's goods; you may have trouble upon trouble, trial upon trial, affliction upon affliction; but if you are one of these righteous ones whose heart God has touched by his Spirit and grace, and who he is training up as an heir of eternal glory, happy, thrice happy is your state and case! Your salvation is of the Lord. Can that be disappointed or disannulled? Not till the Lord ceases to be the Lord. As such he will still be your strength, will help you and deliver you, and eventually bring you into the bliss of his own presence, the fulness of his own joy, and the glory of his own inheritance.

III.—And now comes our last point—*why* the Lord does all this for the righteous: "*because they trust in him.*" That is not the primary but the secondary cause.

But why do they trust in him. Why? Because they can trust in no one else. The times of trouble have weaned them from all earthly confidence. They can no longer trust in their own goodness, wisdom, strength, or righteousness. Driven out of house and home, they cleave to the rock for the want of a shelter. Jesus must be their all in all, for none else have they to look to in heaven or in earth. Thus they trust in the Lord as their only help and hope. O what a blessed thing it is to have in one's own bosom a secret trust in Jesus—that whilst so many are looking to something in themselves or in one another, resting their eternal salvation on works that really

are but the sports of a child, the saint of God is reposing upon the Lord of life and glory. On him he hangs his hope and in him he puts his trust. These the Lord will honour; nor will he ever disappoint their hope or put their confidence to shame. Who ever trusted in the Lord and was confounded? If you are enabled to trust in him, to believe his faithful word, to discard all creature confidence, and to hang the weight of your soul—and O what a weight is that!—upon a faithful, covenant-keeping God, he will never leave, fail, or forsake you. You may find it hard to trust in him at all times or indeed at any time. You may feel a want of something sensible—something to see or hear, distinct from faith. Look not for this. We walk by faith, not by sight. It must be a naked trust in an invisible God. "Some trust in horses, some in chariots, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." (Psl. 20:7.) And if you are enabled so to trust, he will make it manifest sooner or later in your own conscience that you are one of the righteous; light will beam upon your path; glory will dawn upon your heart, and you will have the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul. May we not well add—"Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord!"