

SERMON PREACHED BY MR. HEMINGTON, AT GOWER STREET, ON SUNDAY
MORNING, 5th OCTOBER, 1890

Text: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech.xiii.1)

Nothing would ever have been heard of this blessed fountain if the God of grace had not provided it. His wisdom alone could have chosen such a way of salvation, and His power alone could have put such virtue and efficacy into this fountain as to make it a sovereign remedy for all poor sin-sick souls. No one but a God of love and mercy would ever have condescended to bring the vilest and most defiled of mankind to this fountain to be washed. About this blessed fountain I desire, with God's gracious help, to speak to you; and, without any artificial arrangement of subjects, to set it forth in such ways as we need it. God grant me the needed grace to bring it before you in its glory and greatness!

ONE FOUNTAIN

It is one fountain, and there will never be but this one; neither will poor miserable sinners ever need more than this one. Were there only one physician in this nation, and were he to live in this great Metropolis, then all the physically diseased would have to come to him. And if that one physician prescribed only one medicine for all maladies, then the sick would have to take that or die. So there is but one remedy for all spiritually diseased; and to this fountain, fellow sinner, you must come. To this fountain you must be brought, or you will die in your filth, and appear before God in all the pollution of your nature and in all the defilement of your life. And if you appear before God in that state (bear with me, my friends) you will stand before God as black as the devil and as black a sinner as ever there was in the world. You know that the church, in the Song of Solomon, in speaking according to her feelings, cried out: "I am black... as the tents of Kedar" (Song 1.5). Tens of thousands have tried to find out some other way of washing themselves, or of being washed, rather than by this fountain. Naaman, for instance, the captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a leper, and his leprosy was typical of our spiritual malady, our disease of sin. He was told: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times"; but he demurred, hung back. There was a reserve in his mind, and he said: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? (II Kings v.10,12). Thousands in this day greatly

resemble Naaman. They practically say: "Are not our works as good as God's grace? Or cannot we set up our works in connection with God's grace? Nay not we wash in the waters of our own diligence, abstinence from flagitious iniquity, our own merit - the merit of our own good works?" The Jews observed their new moons and sabbaths, their solemn assemblies, brought a great number of sacrifices and oblations, went "about to establish their own righteousness," and had "not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom.x.3). It meant that they themselves wanted to make a fountain wherein to wash from all their sins. Wherever men have recourse to their own doings in order to wash their souls as sinners, it is an attempt to make their own fountain. I will not dwell further upon this; but there is one fountain, and only one. I have proved that in my own experience, though it is very hard to learn.

It is a great mercy to be brought by the Spirit of God to receive this doctrine and to have the eyes of our understanding enlightened in reference to it (Eph.i.18); for there never will be but one fountain where we can wash and be clean. This fountain is wide and deep, and large enough to plunge in; nothing but our being plunged in will cleanse us from our filthiness. Any part of us not washed in this fountain would remain defiled in the eyes of God.

ORIGINAL SIN AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY

I would like to say a few words on the doctrine of original sin. It is a very solemn truth. Great numbers of professors of religion hold the doctrine of grace, yet are not, I have often thought, so deeply taught by the Spirit of God the total depravity of their nature. The truth is that just one speck of defilement upon a sinner standing before the infinitely righteous God would be enough to damn his soul in hell for ever and ever (Matt.v.20). We must be washed inside and out, body and soul. The entire man is filth, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head" we are impure (Isaiah i.5,6). Hence our cleansing must be as universal as our defilement; and hence we must be led and plunged into this fountain.

NO SINNER TOO GREAT TO BE CLEANSED

This fountain is large enough to take the biggest sinner. Were it not so, I should have despaired many years ago; I am sure I should. I believe there are others here who feel the same. Manasseh was a prodigious sinner; so was the dying thief. I am preaching now, I believe, to a goodly number who feel themselves to be very great sinners; but no sinner can be

too big for this fountain. No one amongst all the myriads of sinners that have ever lived on the earth, and have been brought to this fountain, has ever had to say: "I went to the fountain, but I found I was too great a sinner for the fountain." That was never said, never will be, never shall be. Glory be to God for that! Therefore take heed, poor, troubled, exercised, sensible sinner, that you do not make yourself (or think yourself) to be too great a sinner for God to save. The more you confess your sins to God, the more you will desire to tell Him the worst, the very worst. If you are sincerely and honestly concerned about the salvation of your soul, let there be no reserve with a blessed God. Go to Him about the sins of thy childhood, the sins of thy youth, the sins of thy riper years, and the sins that thou dost not mention to thy friends - not even to thy dearest friends - or to fellow members of the church to which you may belong. But tell God about every one which rises in the dark moments in your conscience; and when you say to yourself: "My sins are too deep, too great; I am too wicked to be able to hope that I shall be saved," this proves that your vision of faith is defective and that you do not view this fountain scripturally. Therefore, let your sins be what they may - take all thy sins, the sin of thy nature, the sins of thy practical departure from the path of uprightness, the sins of thy self-righteous boastings, yea, even if thou art in thy own eyes a real miscreant in sin - yet I repeat what I said: It is dishonouring to God's grace if you make yourself out to be too great a sinner for this fountain to cleanse.

"You can't come too filthy; come just as you are"
(155).

And may the Holy Spirit rivet these truths upon your hearts and consciences with His infinite power!

AN OPEN FOUNTAIN

This fountain is an open fountain. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened." It is not sealed, fastened, closed, shut up; it is open, by which I understand that it is accessible. Accessible to whom? To certain characters, and none but those. Then who are those characters? Such as are convinced by the eternal Spirit of their sins, their depravity, their uncleanness, their very great sinfulness by nature. This fountain is open to all, in the proclamation of the gospel. In other words, it is to be preached to all. It is without discrimination to be sounded and set before all in the preaching of the gospel. You know me too well to think I am an Arminian. I hate Arminianism. I hope to die on the side of God's truth.

Here I will use a figure of speech. This fountain has a covering which swings backward and forward in accordance with the decrees of God. Do you dislike the decrees of God? They are in God's mind, and they are revealed in His word. Watts truthfully says:

"Chained to His throne a volume lies,
With all the fates of men,
With every angel's form and size
Drawn by the eternal pen." (4)

(Matt.xi.25,26; II Cor. iv. 3,4). This covering throws itself back, so to speak, and allows some to see the fountain; whereas from others it is concealed, such as the self-righteous (Matt.xiii.11). To the whole, not to the sick, the fountain shuts itself. The whole do not see the fountain open for them (Matt.ix.12). I do not say that the Spirit of God never takes a self-righteous man and leads him; but, so long as a man thinks himself to be righteous, there is no sight by faith of that fountain opened. I give it to you in the words of incarnate Deity: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt.ix.13). Therefore to the sick, lame, halt, blind, poor, and needy - those who are made so by the grace of God - to such is the door of this fountain opened and also to the backsliding children of God. Let their defilement, their backslidings, their contracted filth, be what they may, this fountain is always open. That is according to God's order on behalf of His people as laid down in the gospel of His Son. The fountain is always open to God's needy children for their uncleanness.

ETERNAL ACCEPTANCE IN CHRIST PRECEDES WASHING

In fact, I go further. According to our standing in the grace of God, so we are in His sight. And, my hearer, you will never know very much of a sweet establishment in the faith of the gospel, a sweet assurance of your acceptance, unless you are brought by the blessed Spirit clearly to conceive the believer's completeness in the Beloved (Co.ii.10). So that God's real saints are justified in Christ before they are washed, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love" (Eph.i.4). In the purpose of God they are already washed, sealed up from all eternity, and meritoriously sealed up when Jesus died upon the cross. Already in His purpose they are believers in Christ. God will never bring them to another account with regard to their lost condition. God says: "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found" (Jer.1.20). I do love to be brought near

to this doctrine by the Spirit, and sometimes He has so distilled and diffused this truth into my heart, opened up the glory of it to my understanding, that I have been compelled to confess the reality of it, by an appropriating faith to take it to myself, and to go boldly as I stand before my God and say: "I do not stand in the condition of the natural man, in the old creation. I do not stand in that state where there is curse, death, and condemnation; but I have been translated out of that state into one in which there is neither curse, death, nor condemnation."

THE DAILY LIFE

But, with regard to our daily walk and lives - at home, in the world, everywhere - the Spirit of God makes us feel the need of coming to this fountain every day for keeping grace.

"Daily I'd repent of sin,
Daily wash in Calvary's blood." (990)

We cannot pray but there is defilement flashing itself before our eyes; we cannot be in God's house, however reverentially we may behave ourselves, however we may desire to feel a deep awe of God upon our spirit, but there will be the defilement of our nature, there will be the workings of indwelling sin - yea, defilement enough in the eye of that infinite God to cause Him to smite us with His rod, were it not for the perfect efficacy of His most precious blood on our behalf. So, let our folly, our wanderings from God, our rebellion, our wrongdoings as His erring children, be what they may, this fountain is open to cleanse us from our errors and from everything which is wrong in our practical walk. Yet it is God's way to bring us under His chastening hand. He will make His children to know that it is a grievous thing to depart from Him. If they walk contrary to God, He will walk contrary to them (Lev.xxvi. 21-43). Nevertheless, this is a high and glorious truth: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John ii.1).

A FOUNTAIN OF LIFE

This fountain is a fountain of life (Lev.xvii.11); it is a fountain of blood, and that blood is the blood of Jesus Christ, which "cleanseth us from all sin" (I John i.7). If you dip a white linen cloth into blood, it would stain it red, it would defile it. Were you to wash your hands in your blood, the blood would really pollute you; but the soul that is washed in the blood of Jesus Christ is made whiter than snow (Psa.li.7).

Our prayers are not this blood, for they need to be sprinkled with this blood; our most spiritual acts are not this blood, for they would never be acceptable to God were they not sprinkled with this blood (Exod.xxviii.38). Baptism is not this blood; it is the outward sign of the remission of our sins (I Pet.iii.21). Baptism cannot of itself cleanse the conscience. Numbers have been baptized that have gone to hell. The Lord's Supper is an emblem of the blood; it is not itself the blood. The dogma of Rome, transubstantiation of the wafer into the body and blood of Christ, is not the blood. For, whether it be the so-called sacramental teaching of the Ritualist or the blasphemous doctrine of Rome, it is nothing but a God-dishonouring attempt to make a fountain in which to wash themselves by their own acts.

Even the sacrifices under the law, ordained by God Himself, were but a foreshadowing of this fountain of blood. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb.ix.13,14). The blood of this fountain has a voice "that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb.xii.24). It is a powerful, penetrating, diffusive, efficacious, and meritorious blood. It speaks in heaven (Heb.ix.12,24); it speaks on earth (I John v.8). It speaks in the gospel (Eph.vi.15; Col.i.20); it speaks in the conscience of every believer (Heb.x.22). And where there are hearts bleeding under the hand of the Spirit, lacerated with a festering sore of sin upon them; poor, discouraged, tried, and intimidated children of God that are fearful of going to this fountain - to such this fountain says: "Come hither, this is the way; here is the fountain for thy sin, uncleanness, defilement." And it takes the same almighty power of God - I prove it more and more - to beat down our cursed unbelief as it does to subdue all our filthiness. Unbelief rises up in my heart today. We very much need the Spirit. I would much like to dwell upon the work of the Spirit in connection with my text, but time forbids.

FEW FEEL A NEED OF THE FOUNTAIN

The bulk of our fellow creatures do not care a rush about this fountain. Just think of the teeming population of London. Where are they this morning? Many of them are despisers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They say, "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" (I Cor.xv.32). Thousands of professors of religion in our day are like the Galatians. They profess

to contend for this fountain - and for something else: their own free-will choice of God and their own works (Gal.iv.9). They would not allow a minister to occupy their pulpit if he ignored the fountain. They know a very great deal about this fountain; they adhere to the truth of the gospel respecting this fountain, and yet never come to it, are never washed in it. They mingle law and gospel.

GOD'S FEARING ONES

Again, there are many real children of God, weak ones in the faith, battered about by doubts and fears, desiring to go to the fountain; but, poor things, they are afraid the fountain is not for them. I am not the minister to browbeat you, to take the whip and cut through the backs of poor sinners. I like to lift up this fountain before you and preach a crucified Christ. The fountain is not barricaded; the Lord has not surrounded it with conditions. If you are concerned about your soul's salvation, I would, in delivering the message of the gospel, say that this fountain is open for you. God is a sovereign. He will sometimes take a course of years to teach one believer what He will accomplish in another in a few months. The Lord sees fit to suffer one to remain in bondage while He sets another at liberty. It is the direct application of this fountain of the blood of atonement to poor sinners' consciences that is needed to quell the fiery darts of the devil (Eph.vi.16). I have proved this again and again - that it is all out of my own power, and that I am as dependent upon God now as I was thirty or forty years ago.

HOW THIS FOUNTAIN WAS PROVIDED

In this chapter (verse 7) you see there is a reference to the great Prophet whom God raised up in the fulness of time, and of whom Moses spoke when he said to Israel: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken" (Deut.xviii.15). Here we have God's co-equal, the eternal Son of God in our nature, co-equal in His Deity and consubstantial with the Father, and yet one with us. What a wonderful God - to assume our humanity and yet to retain His Deity! To be crowned with thorns, to shed His blood, to be the Mediator between God and man, yet to be one of the divine Persons in the Trinity. The glorious Son of God takes upon Himself the nature of His brethren (Heb.ii.11) and becomes verily and truly man, and still remains one in the Trinity. He cried, as He hung upon the cross, "It is finished." There is the infinite and glorious God, who poured out His soul unto death, and shed

His blood for the remission of His people's sins. In this way, and in no other way, would it have been possible (I speak it with reverence) to provide a fountain for this taking away of all uncleanness - the uncleanness of His people.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PEOPLE

In this chapter we also see the very solemn line of distinction which is drawn between people and people. God says: "I will bring the third part through the fire (verse 9). In the parable of the sower we have four parts; here we have three parts, and it is only the third part that is brought through the fire. Those whom the Spirit takes to the fountain are those who are brought through the fire; and those who are led to the fountain are those that have their righteousness burnt up in this fire. They are stripped by the hand of God; they are brought into real humility. God says: "I will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God" (verse 9). Here, then, are people that are spiritually taught, humbled by the hand of God, made willing to learn; to leave their own righteousness, wisdom, strength; every vestige of false hope. They are brought through this furnace. Oh that I may never be ashamed of my God! This is my prayer: "What is wrong in me, Lord, root it out; keep me out of it; do not allow me to go into condemnation. O God, let me bear the marks of Thy truth, of Thy legitimate children! Let me not come into unsanctified fires and unsanctified troubles; bring me through every fire and trouble; and let Christ be exalted in all my afflictions." The result of these fires - the Spirit working in the heart and making the Son of God increasingly precious - shows that they are His people.

THE GLORIOUS CONCLUSION

Finally, mark the end of all this in the words I will now read to you: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him." How? With godly mourning. It shall not be with the tears of an Esau; it shall not be as with the stony-ground hearers, who, because they have no root, soon wither away (Matt.xiii.6); but it shall be with a deep, godly mourning - "as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech.xii.10).