

Spirit to see it is so indeed. Where has He been from eternity? In the bosom of His Father. He knows therefore all that His Father knows, and in the Covenant of grace and peace He possesses all that His Father possessed. There were given to Him all the people His Father loved and made choice of in the council of election. To Him was given, in that covenant, all the grace that He would need and that they would need; all the favour that they would pray for; the righteousness they would seek. To Him was given a terrible gift, the imputation of sin; their sin was made to meet in Him. Grace was given Him before the world began for them, and so it is written in the Psalm - "Grace is poured into Thy lips".

How came He into this world, that Only begotten Son, who had dwelt in the bosom of His Father from eternity? How came He into this world? By the mysterious operations of the Holy Ghost, a body was prepared for Him who was to inhabit it. He that was above all descended into the lower parts of the earth. And what did He come for my friends? What brought Him into the lower parts of the earth? Hart asks the question and answered well

What mighty motive could Thee move?
The motive's plain; 'twas all for love

For love of whom? Of sinners base,
A hardened herd, a rebel race;
That mocked and trampled on Thy blood,
And wantoned with the wounds of God

And now that He is in heaven, having finished the work which His Father gave Him to do, and having returned to His Father, as it is said, what is the position He occupies in heaven? A throned priest, a crowned priest, throned on high, interceding for His own, reigning in and over His own and over the world.

Our life's minutest circumstance
Is subject to His eye

A man's goings are of the Lord - how then can a man understand His own way? - and all the tangled circumstances we may have to perplex and

bring us to feel our ignorance and helplessness are in His hands. He it is who speaks here in this chapter; He finds out witty inventions; He invented Peter's escape from prison, sending His angel to take off the shackles from his feet, to lead him through the various wards of the prison and to cause the prison gates to open of themselves. He found out all this, and how to deliver His servants from temptation has been His work all the years that their sins and temptations have afflicted them, This is our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is in heaven, full of grace and truth. He is counsel, He is understanding, He is might itself, omnipotence itself. May we then, by the Holy Spirit, be enabled to look at this word with a believing heart, and go to Him by that precious faith, and depend on Him, as having counsel. "Counsel is Mine and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength". Here are four things which He is. Counsel. There are two places in which His counsel is known. First, in the Scriptures, this blessed Book. Satan has stirred up men to deny the inspiration of this Book, but that does not make it an uninspired Book. It is inspired and the Speaker is Jesus Christ by His Spirit in many places, and O, sinner, you cannot turn from this counsel and be guiltless. No man can despise the Word of God and be innocent of despising God Himself. "He has magnified His Word above all His Name", and for the Lord's people it is a solemn thing to turn away from the Word of God. If you turn from any doctrine, God may let you wander. If you turn from any precept, He may leave you to follow the counsels of your own heart for a time. If you turn from this Book in any degree, in any particular, God will let you know it sooner or later, O people of God. His counsel is here. "Join prayer", is the advice of a good man, Joseph Hart, respecting the Scripture - "Join prayer with each inspection". Follow that good advice.

His counsel is in another place, namely, the heart of a child of God. It is a mercy if we can follow the Lord Jesus in one word; He says in the Psalms - "I bless the Lord who hath given me counsel". He does counsel His people; gives them counsel by the Word and by His Spirit in the Word. He gives them counsel when He gives them checks in their consciences, when He puts blocks in their way, when He will not let them have their own way, when He will say, in some particular things: Arise ye, get ye hence; this is not your rest, it is

polluted. When, in their hearts, He says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you". He gives them counsel when He says: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly". When He says to them - Ye cannot serve two masters. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon". He gives them counsel in their hearts when He shows them by His Spirit the beauties, the glories of His work and the excellencies and the necessity of His Person as the Mediator; of His work as the Redeemer; of His intercession as their great High Priest, and lets them see all that by faith, and cries - even by the light that shines into their understandings, - cries emptiness upon the whole world respecting the soul. All this is internal, saving, counsel. Happy the men who receive it. "Counsel is Mine".

It is a matter of very great interest to the people of God as they are led to watch what goes on within and are led to perceive God is not far from them at times, giving them heavenly counsel. Do you perceive it? Do you perceive that at times He draws near to you and shines into your heart in some particular respecting Himself and respecting the worth and want of Him, respecting the necessity of knowing and possessing Him for yourself, as your own, that you may say - "I am my Beloved's". Whenever you get this counsel, faith receiving it, it will effectually work in you, and turn you from yourself to Him. This is one very particular thing. To a Church that was apostatising, having come now perilously near to the removal of the candlestick, He says, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see". What counsel it was! And it is just the same today, from time to time, in different measures, this blessed One shows His eternal wisdom in giving this holy, heavenly, efficacious counsel in the heart, and if the tinsel of this world attracts and holds the eye of a sinner for any time, the counsel comes, the shining attraction is given, and the soul by faith sees through all the deceitfulness of this world and the solid grace and mercy that Jesus Christ possesses.

"I wisdom dwell with prudence". I have durable riches and

righteousness. Now let us then, as God helps us, look closely into this, for, be assured my dear friends, that if you rest on notions about Christ, however correct they may be, if you rest on what you pick up in the Scriptures, or what you may hear from the minister, if you rest on those things, without any power in your souls to save you from yourselves, you will find that when you most need the solid support you will lack it. You will find when you need what you thought about, but have never had in your hearts, that you have had a woeful trust; you have trusted in a shadow. But what a mercy it is to have this counsel. Bless the Lord for giving it to some of us. May we never cease to bless Him that He has given us counsel respecting many things.

He says in the Scripture - "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." He says - "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it". Now we may very much admire such counsel, but if it never goes beyond our head, what a solemn thing. But if, by His Holy Spirit, the Lord gives this counsel to our hearts, and we thus receive it as the word of God working effectually in us, the result will be that we shall open our mouth; we shall call upon Him in the day of trouble; we shall lay our cases before Him as we feel them; lay our wants before Him, as they press upon us; lay our sins before Him as we feel the burden and the evil of them. And our weakness, and all the things that trouble us, we shall lay before Him in humble, gracious, believing obedience to this heavenly counsel. Do you get this counsel?

I counsel thee to do this. I am counsel. All that the case of a child of God calls for He is able to counsel you in. The Lord give this gracious counsel according to His blessed Word. "Blessed is the man that heareth Me." Blessed is the sinner who hears this holy counsel. He says - "Come unto Me". He says it in the Word and men despise it. There is a despising of it in our nature. He speaks in the heart and then it brings the sinner to obedience and He says:

Lo, glad I come, and Thou blest Lamb
Shall take me to Thee as I am

This is heavenly counsel. He gives it to His poor people and they

walk in it. They come to Him. Is it not wonderful that He receives sinners and eats with them? "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them". He has given them the counsel to come, the counsel has imparted power to them to do so, and He honours that counsel and their obedience of faith, and He receives them; receives them to eat with them, to make them His guests and to entertain them with His own fulness and His own mercy. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest".

He counsels sinners, His own people, who are burdened, and this is His counsel - "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you". "Cast thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved." As if He said, bring that care that you have, that family trouble, that business perplexity, all the things that pain you, bring them to Me. Personal and relative things, soul needs as well as body needs, bring them all to Me. This is heavenly counsel in the heart. Bring your afflictions to Me; bring your desires to have the afflictions sanctified to Me. And when that blessed counsel is rightly heard and received, then it is that the sinner finds that the Lord can be good, as good as His word, and better than the highest expectations. You never expected as much as He has given you, and as He will give you.

This is the counsel He gives His people then. If we have received it, happy are we. He counsels churches. He looks at them, He looks on them in their various states and works, He finds fault with them, He approves what is good in them, commends them, tells them about it, and then comes and points out to them their faults and what those faults are. Counsels them how to behave. "Repent" - those who have left their first love - "Repent and do the first works". "I have not found thy works perfect before God". It is good for a church to have a gracious Saviour who will be faithful to point out their faults to them; it is a mercy He does it. A very striking type of this is the Lord rising early and sending His prophets to Israel, and saying by His prophets, O do not this thing. It is a mercy when such a type is realised in the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And He comes to a Church and says, here is this danger, this error of doctrine, the enemy putting a false experience or setting some foolish doctrine before them, and the Lord says, O do

not this thing. He counsels a sinner, gives him holy caution, the tender fear of God, which enables him to say - "Open Thou mine eyes". "That which I see not teach Thou me". Leave me not to err in my heart from Thy ways. Prayer always follows counsel given and received. Prayer will also follow that holy counsel in your heart and what the Lord counsels you to do and not to do, you will be asking Him to enable you to do and keep from doing. "Counsel is Mine". And if we do not get it, it is a solemn thing for us. If He lets you do something and never counsels you against it; if He leaves you to walk in your own ways. and never counsels you with respect to the narrow way which leadeth unto life; if He leaves you to be a Pharisee and never reproves you for your self-righteousness; if He leaves you to the world and in it, and never counsels you to come out of it; it is an evidence of the most solemn and dreadful kind, that He takes no notice of you. But if He loves you He wont leave you so. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten". He meets us in the way when we are wayward and determined to have our own way; a solemn meeting sometimes when, according to the Scripture, He meets us as a bear bereaved of her whelps, to tear the caul of our heart; very solemn, but then there is mercy in that, great mercy.

These heavenly counsels then come from the Lord Jesus unto the Church, come to individual members of His body, and all arising from His jealous love. He is so jealous of the love of a sinner that He says, I will break your idols. Also I will purge away thy tin and thy dross; and a mercy it is.

And sound wisdom. This is opposed to the vain philosophy of the world; this is opposed to science, falsely so called. This is sound, not erring wisdom, but eternal wisdom. This comes to real things; it comes to people; it respects many things. Let us look at one or two by the help of the Lord. Sound wisdom is Christ's. Therefore every word that proceeds out of His mouth is true. Every word of God is pure, every doctrine in this Book is pure; nothing superfluous either. The doctrine of God's Being, how wonderful and how pure. Look at the false gods the Bible discovers; Baal and Ashtaroth, and all the gods that deceived the Jews after the Lord had put them into the land of promise. See these false gods and how they brought desolation, captivity, and eventually ruin. Sound wisdom sets forth in the

Scriptures the true and living God; the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and the Holy Ghost who proceeds from the Father and the Son. I would be glad if the Lord would enable me in my last days of speaking in His Name to so speak about Himself as by the Spirit of grace to make true impressions on your hearts and minds of this Divine Being, One God in Three Persons; Three Persons in One God. And to know this God is life eternal. An impression of this God on your soul will be an indellible impression if made by Him who is Wisdom. This is sound wisdom. Happy the man who has got it, who can say from his heart at times, I believe in God. It may not seem much, but it is much; it will keep you from idolatry whenever it is effectually working in you. It will move you to leave vain and foolish things that do not profit. It will make you pursue after right things if you believe in God, and if you believe that, because He would save His people, He gave His only begotten Son and sent Him - as the greatest possible manifestation of His love - sent Him into this world, that we may live through Him; and that Christ, now in heaven, sends the promise of the Father, His good Spirit, so that that Spirit should be the guide of the soul and the testifier of the Lord Jesus. We are Trinitarians if this sound wisdom has been spoken in us. Sound wisdom will enable you also, as given to you, to handle all your matters wisely. "He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good". This will enable the man who gets it to handle the matter of indwelling sin wisely. The man who sees that the law of sin in his members is powerful and deceitful and that again and again he is conquered thereby, with this wisdom in his heart, will handle the matter wisely. How will he handle it? By taking it to the Lord, praying that the Lord Jesus who conquered for him once will in him conquer too, and that often. Wisdom will tell you that you cannot manage it yourself. Sound wisdom will tell you that, but sound wisdom is not only negative in this matter; it is positive. It will tell you who can do it, who has promised to do it. "Sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace." And this sound wisdom will enable you to make up a reckoning that nature can never, never reach. What is that? This, as you have it in the Romans - "Likewise reckon ye yourselves also to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ". This keeps a person from two evils. It keeps him from despair when he looks, in the light of God's teaching, into a wicked nature, into a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. He cannot despair, however much

he looks into that heart when wisdom, which is teaching him what he is, teaches him also what Christ is. It keeps him from despair and it keeps him from presumption. It keeps him from that heady high-mindedness of which the Apostle speaks. It keeps a person from being carried about with every wind of doctrine. It keeps him low, but it keeps him dependent, depending, from time to time. Sound wisdom. Do you get it? Does it come sometimes, making you wise unto salvation?

"I am understanding". We are not understanding people. We may be understanding people in regard to this world, and some subjects we may quite understand and we may understand some sciences; but we may be ignorant of them. And, as I have said often, perhaps, to you, you may be ignorant of sciences and have no inconvenience; ignorance of some things is not inconvenient. But there is an understanding that is desirable and necessary to salvation, and Christ is that and He can speak it unto His people. I have been struck sometimes with that word in Jeremiah - "I know the thoughts that I think toward you". Now what a striking difference there is between having those divine thoughts which have been in the heart of God from eternity - His thoughts upon you - and your thoughts about Him. O, the limited, contracted, erroneous thoughts of God that may lodge in us! Well, may the Lord say, respecting us in that particular: "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee". But if divine thoughts - thoughts which have been always in Him - if these thoughts come from His lips, and are spoken on our hearts - these divine thoughts upon us spoken on our hearts - then we have some understanding. Not that we can fully enter into Deity, not that we can fully enter into the counsels of peace that were in eternity - their ramifications taking in every minute circumstance of a child of God - not that we can enter into the infinite goodness and love and power and mercy and compassion of the Lord; but when thoughts of peace are really thought into the heart of a sinner by the Holy Spirit, then there is an understanding in them. They are above nature; they are above ourselves. As we are told in Isaiah, so we feel - As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my thoughts above your thoughts. My friends, He understands our sorrows, fully enters into them. He knows, He marks, He understands a sigh divine, a secret groan. He sees a want, a real pressing want; knows how it presses, knows the effect of it, sees everything that can

be connected with it, or grow out of it. He sees it all. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us except in a small degree, but it is brought to be a comfort, a stay, a support, and a guide at times, so that the child of God can put his case, with humble confidence, into the hands of this great One, who says: "I am understanding". He knows our thoughts afar off; that was something to the Psalmist. "Thou knowest my thought afar off", what it is, which way it goes, the object of it, to the end of its pursuit; He knows it all. If it be wrong, He is able to correct it, and He does correct it in His people. "I am understanding". He understands our weakness, all the weakness of our faith; knows what we mean when we say: "Lord, increase our faith". He understands the treachery of our nature, and understands a sigh - Make me honest and keep me honest. Make me upright, and keep me so to the very end. He understands the readiness with which we comply with vile temptations, how sometimes we tempt the tempter. He sees the evil designs of men, even when they are His instruments to accomplish His purpose of chastening. He sends Assyria to punish a hypocritical nation, but Assyria went with his own designs. Then said the Lord, when he has done My business, I will visit him for his own designs, and I will punish the stout hearted Assyria. All this, made known to us by the Holy Spirit, gives this confidence in Him. Nothing can surprise Him, nothing can transpire that He has not a perfect understanding of. "I am understanding".

"I have strength". One brief word here. We have weakness; we are weakness. Then what a fitting there will be between this, and in this, when He graciously speaks: "I have strength". And it says this, as it did to the Apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee". That will do sinner; that will make you bear the thorn in the flesh, and prefer to have it rather than to get rid of it and lack the grace. That will do. I have strength to bear you up. I have made and I will carry even down to your grey hairs, and all the things that attend old age and weakness, you have. I will bear you, I will carry you in My bosom. O sinking saint, God help you to hearken to this word: "Underneath are the everlasting arms". Underneath you; underneath your faith, underneath your hope, underneath every grace, lest they should fail, are the everlasting arms. Underneath your soul and your being and all the things that interest you and are for His glory, are the everlasting arms. Nothing can fall or break short of the

accomplishment of His purpose. Underneath all the sighs and desires of your soul, as in the chapter we read this evening - Judah sought Him with all their desire. He knows this and has strength and will answer. Yes, Daniel got an answer, not immediately; there may be enemies and difficulties, God permitting them to stand between you and an answer for some time, but the answer will come. "Ask what thou wilt, it shall be done".

May the Lord help us to believe this great word, I mean my text. May He help us to believe it. "I have strength", just what we need and fitting into our need.

AMEN.