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DEVONSHIRE ROAD PULPIT,
GREENWICH, S.E.

A Safe Passage for Pilgrims.

A SERMON

DELIVERED BY THE PASTOR,

JOSEPH JARVIS.

On Lord's Day Evening, October 4th, 1914.

"But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."—ISAIAH xliii. 1, 2.

WITHOUT question the precious words of our text have primary application to the lineal descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, who also for many centuries received the wonderful consolation contained in them, and it may be that in centuries yet to come Israel after the flesh will rejoice in the boundless consolation which remains. But the text has, nevertheless, just as true an application to the *spiritual* Israel of God as to His ancient national people, for the Divine promise to Abraham embraced both the Jewish and the Gentile worlds. Listen to the gracious terms of that covenant promise, "By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in **THY SEED SHALL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED**; because thou hast obeyed My voice." Thus Abraham became the father both of the circumcision and the uncircumcision, as the apostle argues, for he received faith before he received circumcision that he might be "the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed to them also. For the promise that he should be the *heir of the world*, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace; to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all; as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations." So you see, brethren, from these words of the apostle that God made Abraham "the heir of the world," and the father of all who believe. Hence we may justly follow a twofold interpretation of such terms as those of "Jacob" and "Israel," which we find in our text. But however we feel led to apply them, you will observe that both are addressed to character, for, *Jesurun, Jacob and Israel*, are the persons named. Listen: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that

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formed thee, O Israel, Fear not." Here we have *creation* and *formation*. All of us are the subjects of the Lord's natural *creation*, but are we the subjects of the Lord's spiritual *formation*? There is a wide difference between creation and formation, for our creation has been spoiled by sin and we therefore need forming anew. The people had been created, but their creation had been marred, of whom the Lord said, "This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." These vessels were marred, not in the making, but after they left the heavenly Potter's hands. We read in the Epistle to the Romans of vessels of mercy and of vessels of wrath; the former, afore prepared by Divine wisdom and love unto glory, and the latter fitted by their own wilful and wanton sins to destruction. Marvellous mystery of the Divine working, stupendous grace, and unsearchable wisdom and holiness! Well may we exclaim with the apostle, "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Brethren, let us each pause a moment to ask a pointed, personal, and solemn question, Am I a vessel of mercy, or am I a vessel of sin and wrath? can I praise God both for creation and renovation? can I sing with that man of God whom many of us love for the manifold graces and gifts bestowed upon him,

"Jesus, Jehovah, Lord of heaven and earth,
To whom I owe my first and second birth,
Whose hand first formed me and whose precious blood
Redeemed my soul and gave me peace with God"—Hart.

Happy are we if thus we can rejoice not only in our creation, but in our regeneration and re-formation, for then to us, whether our faith be strong or weak, the cheering message of our text is sent, "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine." This Divine "Fear not" you will observe is sent to those who are *formed anew*; it matters not whether you are but a wrestling Jacob, seeking the Lord, or whether you are among those happy souls who have "found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write;" if only you are alive Godward, to you is this word of salvation and consolation sent. But what a very solemn *inference* may be drawn with respect to *those who are not formed anew* from this cheering word to the regenerate. My friends, the Lord sends a "Fear not" only to those who fear and love Him. If therefore you are strangers to this holy, filial fear, the Lord sends no "Fear not" to you, but on the other hand you have every reason to fear, for you are neither seekers, nor finders, nor in any true sense in *fellowship* with the Lord and His church. However, we must come more directly to the text. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." After a somewhat lengthy introduction, in which some matters of moment arising out of the text have been touched upon, I shall not revert to those matters, but go on to the great and grand *doctrine of redemption* through the blood of the cross. This, as it appears in the text, we will designate, *Divine redemption*, "I have

redeemed thee." Secondly we will notice, *Divine calling*, "I have called thee by thy name." Thirdly, *Divine possession*, "Thou art Mine." Fourthly, *Divine ordination*, for though not mentioned, this doctrine is implied by the words, "When thou passest through the waters;" again, "And through the rivers;" and yet again, "When thou walkest through the fire;" for these painful, necessary and enriching experiences could never fall to our lot apart from Divine ordination. Then fifthly, we will consider the promise of the *Divine presence*, "I will be with thee." And lastly, the cheering word which tells of *Divine limitation*, "They (the waters) shall not overflow thee;" again, "Thou shalt not be burned;" and yet again, "Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

I. We have, first of all then, to consider the great and comforting doctrine of *DIVINE REDEMPTION*. Redemption! what a word! redemption through His blood, the precious blood of the Lamb; and remember that this glorious redemption provides for "the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." Oh, my friends, how happy are we if we have but the pledge of redemption, yes, happy notwithstanding all our sorrows, and all the trials of the way. If redeemed we *must* be in a *happy state* at all times, though we be in a happy frame but *sometimes*. Does not Moses exclaim, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency; and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places"? Israel is happy, you see, because redeemed and saved by the Lord. The Word of God knows nothing of salvation apart from redemption. Now while we think of redemption; let us remember from what we are redeemed. Brethren, we are redeemed from sin, redeemed from sin's dominion, redeemed from sin's awful wages, yea, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Yes, we are "Redeemed from hell and sealed for heaven." Oh, ours is a wonderful redemption! we had sold ourselves for nought, and we were redeemed without money, for no money could have redeemed us; no human merit, nor labourings, nor sufferings could have redeemed us; the redemption of our souls was too costly for gold, or silver, or rubies, but we were "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." Thus are we "dearly bought, highly esteemed; redeemed, with Jesus' blood redeemed!"

II. We will now pass on to *DIVINE CALLING*, for the text reads, "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name." It is an infinite mercy to be called of God, for if our *calling* is sure our *election* is sure, and if our calling and election are sure our redemption also is most sure. What a glorious chain of golden doctrines we have in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and how comely is the daughter of Zion when the heavenly Bridegroom puts this chain about her neck, and holy love to Him imparts to her heart an unfeigned delight in the wearing of it. Listen to this wonderful revelation of Divine grace to which I have referred, for by it you may learn that *effectual calling* links every called one with all the eternal purposes of

Jehovah's grace and leads him with absolute certainty to everlasting glory and joy. The apostle, by the Spirit here says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, TO THEM WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, THEM HE ALSO CALLED: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Oh, what infinite depths of Divine grace and holy mysteries are here! yes, and mysteries to the human mind they must ever remain, for "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever." But, brethren, Divine calling furnishes the key to all these boundless treasures of eternal wisdom, grace, and glory, and reveals our interest in them.

You will observe too that the calling of our text, and that also to which I have referred in the Epistle to the Romans, is a *personal calling*: "I have called thee by *thy name*," and again, "The called according to His purpose." Are we the subjects of this special personal call? Now remember that if you have received the *personal call* to Christ and holiness, you have *personally come* to Christ longing for His grace and holiness. My brother, is thy heart regenerate? is thy will renewed? art thou walking in Zion's way, and hast thus come to Christ for mercy, for pardon, for peace, for sanctification, and for redemption? and art thou *daily coming* to the Saviour? for remember that if thou hast *once* truly come, thou wilt *continue* to come; indeed thou wilt never cease to come till thy Saviour shall come to fetch thee to His home above, for the injunction is, "To Whom *coming* as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious." Coming after this manner, my friends, your calling is assured; and if your calling is assured, then your predestination is assured; and if your predestination is assured, God's gracious foreknowledge of you is assured; and thus without question your justification is assured; and your longing and labouring while here for conformity to Christ is assured, and your eternal glorification is as certain as the Being and purpose of the Most High. The carnal mind kicks at these holy doctrines, but those who are born from above and instructed by the Holy Spirit bless God for the certain salvation which they secure to every one who comes to God through the great Mediator Jesus.

III. We have next to speak of *DIVINE POSSESSION*: "Thou art Mine." Wonderful words! "Thou art Mine," for they imply that believers are not only the Lord's by creation, but by adoption, by eternal love and choice, by redemption, by conquest, and by voluntary surrender. But let us never forget that this incomparable privilege involves great and grave responsibility with regard to our life and walk: "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." If we are the Lord's then we must be separated from the ungodly world that lieth in wickedness, and we must be separate too from the world of dead, false, and delusive profession. "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."

"Be to this world as dead,
Alive to that to come;
Our life with Christ is hid

Who soon shall call us home.
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice,
The trump of God shall sound, 'Rejoice,'"

How precious this short sentence of our text, "Thou art Mine!" How it reminds us of our Lord's own words in that matchless address of His to the Father, "They are Thine; and all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them." How mysterious and wonderful the Lord's delight in His purchased possession! how marvellous that He should set His love upon such worthless creatures! and oh, what joy is ours when we realise that we are His own children, His jewels, with whom He will never part. I feel and know that I *cannot* live without Him, and I know also, when His Spirit beareth witness with my spirit, that He *will not* live without me. Oh, what a price He paid for me! let us think of this when we ponder the precious declaration, "Thou art Mine;" and let us remember also that

"So rich a cost can ne'er be lost,
Though faith be tried by fire.
Keep Christ in view, let God be true,
And every man a liar."—*Hart*.

IV. Now just a word on *DIVINE ORDINATION*. This doctrine, as I have already hinted, is to be inferred from the text, for here we have waters, and rivers, and fire, and flame mentioned, and the people of God as passing through them, and it is certain that this could not possibly be the case without Divine ordination. The Lord who hath ordained peace for us hath also ordained our troubles and pains. Neither God's eternal and boundless love, nor Christ's glorious redemption, nor the Holy Spirit's regenerating grace preserve us from the *fact* of trouble, though they preserve us from the *curse* of trouble. Let this matter therefore be fully settled in your hearts, for "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Trouble, and trial, and grief, and pain, and disappointments are as much the lot of God's elect as of the worldling, yea, they are just as certain as their heavenly privileges and joys. This truth may be illustrated by that beautiful narrative of Lazarus's sickness and death, for in connection with this we read, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." What a paradox of Divine love! what an opposite course our Lord took to that which nature and reason would have dictated! We should have supposed that upon the receipt of such serious news the Lord's love to Lazarus would have constrained Him to have set out for Bethany immediately, but the greater glory of God and the greater benefit in store for His people demanded the gracious and instructive delay. Besides they needed, and we also need, the *trial of faith even by fire*, that we may learn knowledge and understand doctrine and discipline. We need the *waters* too, that we may be cleansed from some of our extravagances of thought and action, as also from all our idols. Yes, we need the waters, fire, and the flame to purge away our dross; therefore the Lord has ordained them for His glory and our good. Now the *rivers* to my mind represent the ordinary and constant flow of the troubles of life. Man, whether renewed or unrenewed, is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, they are, through sin, his appointed heritage. Do not imagine, my brethren, when you have to drink a very bitter cup of sorrow that no one else has a cup so bitter; this is quite a mistake. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you." Demand none of that the "same

afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world," nor shall we long be free of them till we reach the better world.

The *waters* perhaps represent very great and *unusual afflictions*, unexpected *outbursts of trial, sudden calamity*, such as befel the patriarch Job. It may be terrible and *heart-crushing bereavement*; it may be some unnatural and *treacherous behaviour* of a relative or friend; it may be the sudden knowledge of a *fatal, personal, or relative malady* which springs upon you and says, "Thus saith the Lord, Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live;" or it may be an instant stroke of devastating *business failure*. None of these things are uncommon any more than the sudden rising of flooding waters are uncommon, although much more *uncommon* than the quiet and constant flowing river.

The last-mentioned ordinance of suffering, namely, *the fire and the flame*, we may look upon as commonly representing persecution and martyrdom. The three Hebrew children were cast into the burning fiery furnace, and thousands of Christ's martyrs since their day have been burnt to death by Rome-Pagan and Rome-Papal; and thousands upon thousands of the Lord's people have suffered a mystical martyrdom in all ages of the Church, in the form of milder persecution, both from without and within; and still the word is being verified which tells us that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" and still it is true that

"All who feel the load of sin,
Yet come off victorious,
Suffer martyrdom within,
Though it seem less glorious."

V. Now consider for a few moments the promise of the DIVINE PRESENCE. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." This is the promise of the Old Testament. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," is the promise of the New Testament. This promise is very precious, for in the Lord's presence we find strength for *labour and suffering*; His presence turns *midnight into noon*, and the very *shadow of death into the morning*.

"In His presence I am happy,
In His presence I'm secure;
In His presence all afflictions
I can easily endure."

The presence of the Son of God with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego turned their fiery furnace into a veritable palace of the King; they were *great gainers* by the fire in spiritual experience, nor did they lose anything of their earthly substance but *their bonds*. Many of us can testify also that we have been *gainers* by the fire of persecution, and the *greatest gainers* when the furnace has been heated one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. The Lord grant us His holy health-giving presence in all our afflictions, and we will never complain either of the chilling floods or the blasting flames.

VI. We come now last of all to DIVINE LIMITATION, for concerning the rivers the Lord says, "I will be with thee;" concerning the waters, "they shall not overflow thee;" concerning the fire, "Thou shalt not be burned;" the flame, "Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." What gracious and effectual limitations to what are, when rightly understood, gracious ordinances! We sometimes sing of these loving purposes and limitations in a verse which is quite an exposition of the text:—

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

Thus you see, brethren, that we have the promise that none of life's fires shall burn so as to injure us; nay, the flame shall not even kindle injuriously upon us; none of the swelling waters of trouble shall overwhelm us; none of the rivers of life's surging sorrows shall overflow us; and, mark you, that all these unspeakable blessings are ours because of the *Divine presence*, the *Divine promise*, and the *Divine limitations* which bound, and sanctify, and bless to our souls all the miseries, and pains, and perils of this mortal state. Nor shall we who fear the Lord sink in the last deep and dark *river of death*, for we are apt to think of death as the "narrow sea" or bridgeless river which divides the heavenly land from ours. Bunyan uses this figure, and represents one of his pilgrims as sinking in its deep waters for a time, but at last safely landed on the heavenly shores. "Moreover, that inquiry of the prophet Jeremiah, "What wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?" has deeply exercised many of our hearts till, contemplating the awful solemnities of that hour, we have cried,

"Oh that in Jordan's swelling
I may be helped to sing;
And pass the river telling
The triumphs of my King!"

How grateful and praiseful we ought to be as a Church and people to the Lord of life and death for the many gracious manifestations of Himself accorded to our departing friends. Rejoicing in the pardon of all their sins, and so delivered from all their gloomy fears, many of our loved ones have gone in triumph to glory. Our beloved friend and sister, Mrs. Clarkson, who has so lately left us for the heavenly country, was as highly favoured of the Lord in this respect as any of our friends who preceded her. Enjoying thus fully her interest in Christ, she wished the beautiful hymn to be sung, and sang it herself with the heart, if not with the voice:

"Yes, I shall soon be landed On yonder shores of bliss; There, with my powers expanded, Shall dwell where Jesus is. Yes, I shall soon be seated With Jesus on His throne; My foes be all defeated, And perfect peace made known.	With Father, Son, and Spirit, I shall for ever reign; Sweet joy and peace inherit, And every good obtain. I soon shall reach the harbour To which I speed my way; Shall cease from all my labour, And there for ever stay."
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Our dear friend's earthly life was a long one and a very trying one, but attended with innumerable mercies. Her mother was called into the eternal world when she was but nine years of age, and the heavy duties of housekeeping for her father at once fell upon her. She was called by grace in her early days, and became a very devoted disciple of the Lord Jesus. Her married life was one of trial and struggle, though happy; she became the mother of a large family, but notwithstanding her innumerable home duties in those days, she used to walk from Kentish Town to Gower Street to hear the gospel from the lips of such godly men as the late J. C. Philpot, M.A., John Kershaw, and other men of like character. The first Lord's day after her husband's death she went to "City Road" and heard the late Mr. Vinall preach from the text, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." This proved to her a very remarkable and seasonable word, and although, after a time, she lived at a great distance, she used to walk all the way on the Lord's day, with her whole family, to hear the word of the Lord from the same preacher. There I believe she continued for some years, but finally, in the good providence of God and by the help of one of our dear friends now in heaven, and another who is still with us, although past his ninetieth birthday, our friend removed to

Greenwich. This was more than 30 years ago. Mrs. Clarkson was baptised by my predecessor, Mr. James Boorne, and continued to the end a faithful, affectionate, and consistent member of this church. She mentioned to me on her dying bed the great love she had always felt to the house and worship of the Lord, saying, "You have no one at Devonshire Road who has loved to meet with the people of God more than I;" and I might add that she was often very greatly favoured in hearing the word, particularly so in her latter days, and she testified that she had *never* been absent from the means of grace through neglect. Her son with whom she lived, writing me of his dear mother, says: "From my earliest remembrance her affections were set upon the ways of God, the things of God, and the people of God. During her illness, as soon as we returned from chapel she always asked for the text, the Scripture read as a lesson, and the hymns. Not long since we sang the hymn commencing, 'Immortal honours rest on Jesus' head, My God, my Portion, and my Living Bread.' With this she was much delighted and exclaimed, 'What a lovely hymn!' She also recited with joy several times, 'My hope is built on nothing less But wholly lean on Jesus' Name Than Jesus' blood and righteousness: On Christ the solid Rock I stand, I dare not trust the sweetest frame, All other ground is sinking sand.'" The day before she passed away, she quoted with much feeling the verse: "A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, Be Thou my Strength and Righteousness, On Thy kind arms I fall; My Jesus and my All."

Among many other comforting sayings during her sickness, she would often repeat, "He has been a good God to me." Yes, and our dear friend spoke from experience, for she was left a widow with six children, the eldest under eleven years of age, and with no helper but God, and she found Him "The Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widow in His holy habitation." He brought her honourably through every difficulty and need, prospered more or less all of her children in this life, but better still, has called some of them openly to profess His holy name; and I am inclined to think that each of the others are at least seeking His face. Mrs. Clarkson had such a visitation from the Lord at the beginning of her illness that in speaking of it to me she said, "My full soul could hold no more of everlasting love." And near the close she enjoyed similar blessing, for she exclaimed, "Raise me, raise me;" and the watchers thought she wished to be raised in bed. Then she said, "Raise me to heaven. I want lifting to heaven, I long to be gone." "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." After this she wished every one of the family good-bye, and entered glory at 4.15 on Thursday morning, Sept. 24th. I saw her for the last time the day before her departure, read and prayed with her and, referring to her chequered pathway, quoted the well-known beautiful lines: "Deep waters crossed life's pathway, Oh to sing Hallelujah!
The hedge of thorns was sharp; With yon triumphant band,
Now these lie all behind me, Who sing where glory dwelleth,
Oh for a well-tuned harp! In Emanuel's land."

She entered with heart and soul into all, asked me to give her love to a friend, bade me an affectionate good-bye, and we parted to meet no more till the "day dawn and the shadows flee away." She is now "For ever with the Lord." The Lord command His blessing upon His Word, upon her children, and upon all the friends who knew and loved her, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Donations or Subscriptions towards printing expenses and free circulation of these Sermons will be gratefully received.