

The following exposition of Zech.iii.1-8, was given by Mr. Oldfield in Gower Street Chapel, London, on Sunday morning, 8th May, 1892. (We greatly regret that we have no report of the evening discourse, which was based on Zech.iii.9).

When I came to London yesterday, there were two or three portions running through my mind, and I thought that the Lord would enable me to speak to you from one of them; but, before I went to bed last night, I seemed to lose everything, and my mind was darker than the darkness that surrounded my body. I wondered what I should do, I felt as though I could not preach; there was no text in the Bible for me to preach from. Before I went to sleep I became very much exercised and said to myself: "If I am confounded before the people, I cannot help it; there is no help for me. If God does not help me, I must cease." I fell asleep like that, and I awoke with this portion (Zech.iii) on my mind in such a powerful way that I could not get away from it. So specially was it opened up to me that I could not help weeping on my bed. I wish, if it were God's will, that it might be applied to every heart here as I felt it between five and six o'clock this morning: I mean, God's pleasure in Joshua, and what is said about him.

Joshua is set before us in this chapter as a type of the church. You will remember that Zerubbabel and Joshua were two important persons. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah and Joshua the high priest (Hag.i.1); and so Zerubbabel is more particularly a type of Christ, whilst Joshua is a type of the church; and as a type of the church we have him set before us in a variety of ways in this chapter. Joshua is standing before the Angel of the Lord, and so the church of the living God has stood, and does stand, before the Angel of the Lord. Jehovah-Jesus is the Angel of the Lord, and, as I understand it, the church stood before Jehovah-Jesus ere time began. There is here an allusion to the church under the type of Jerusalem with her filthy garments. But the church existed, and was in God's heart, before she had filthy garments. God did not choose His church in her filth; I do not believe that. I believe that the church of God was in His heart from all eternity, loved by Him and chosen by Him, as Mr. Philpot puts it, "antecedent to, and irrespective of, the fall." That I most firmly believe. God's church, as viewed by Him, was loved and chosen before the fall - just as human beings have an existence before they have garments. You had a body before you had a covering of any kind put upon you. And so the church of God had an existence in the mind of Jehovah,

was chosen and loved by Him, before she had any filthy garments. Do you find man coming out of the hands of God in creation with filthy garments? No; nothing of the kind. We do not find that Adam and Eve were clothed with man-made garments, much less with devilish garments. Heaven did not furnish them at first, much less did hell clothe them. We find that Adam and Eve were naked, and they were not ashamed. And why should they be? They were naked in the sense of man-made apparel not being upon them; but they had a heavenly garment, the purity and brightness of God, upon them. They were made "in the likeness of God" (Gen.v.1). How should they then be ashamed of such garments as these made by God - His brightness, His purity? What was there to be ashamed of? My friends, you know that, when sin entered, this bright, pure raiment (if I may so express it) was gone, as Ke Kent puts it:

"Adam, when the tempter foiled him,
His bright robes were quickly gone" (920).

Then came shame. There was sin; and, where there is sin, there is shame. Then, as Adam had an existence before he had filthy garments upon him, so the church was in Adam. All the human family were in his loins before sin entered, and death by sin; and so the church of God lived before the fall and was chosen before the fall. Then, when the fall took place, God was not taken by surprise. His love was not taken from the objects of it, nor was His choice or His purpose in the least altered.

Hence the Lord speaks here of Joshua as His choice, His eternal choice. What a mercy to be interested in God's everlasting choice! So that Joshua was a type of the church of God before there were any filthy garments on! The delights of Jesus were with His church and people before the world was made, before there was a creature - angel or man (Prov.viii. 22-31). Then she was loved by Him after she was created, after sin entered, and death by sin. God is eternal in His purposes, truth, and love as well as in His nature. The time comes, then, for each of the people of God to occupy individually the position which Joshua occupied when he stood before the Angel "clothed with filthy garments." These filthy garments are the garments that Satan has, so to speak, woven, the garments that he introduced and put upon our first parents in the garden of Eden. How filthy those garments are, then - filthy in the extreme! What but that which is filthy can come from Satan? As nothing but what is clean can come from God, so nothing but what is unclean can come from Satan. What filthy garments in thought, word, and action were introduced into Eden! What a change took place! Adam lost his bright, pure robes, and he finds Satan's filthy garments on. Then he was ashamed, and so

he tried to hide amongst the trees of the garden. And not only so, but both Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together and thus tried to cover their shame and their nakedness. They were made conscious of it, and so they were ashamed. And is it not so? How often, apart from the Spirit of God, man and woman, boys and girls, and sometimes quite infants, have a consciousness of wrong that produces more or less of shame; so that, when they have done that which is wrong, they feel they want something to conceal their shame. And even then they merely cover or conceal it; they do not take it away, for that can be done by God alone, by an application of the blood of His own dear Son.

Joshua felt himself a ragged, vile one, in whose heart and conscience judgment had been laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet (Isa.xxviii.17). The Lord had discovered to him his filthy garments, and he knew that he was filthy in his thoughts, filthy in both body and soul. The garment, so to speak, of his soul was pride. What a filthy garment is that! Another garment was, as it were, his body. How polluted, vile, corrupt, and sinful did he feel his body to be! And so do all God's people under divine teaching. But, notwithstanding this, they come, drawn by the Holy Spirit. They cannot keep away from God, from Jesus Christ. They come and stand before the Angel.

Another point is Joshua's helplessness. The helplessness of the church of God arose through the fall of man, and man stands in such a place as this before Christ with filthy garments on, the devil being at his right hand to resist him. Why did Joshua stand there? Because he was helpless: he had no power to make himself better, no power to cleanse, or to strip himself of these filthy garments, no power to clothe himself with other garments. The Arminian would say: "Why do you stand there? Why don't you wash yourself, clothe yourself, take off those rags, scatter them to the winds, and put on the righteousness of Christ?" My dear friends, what vain talk is that! The poor thing says: "I would if I could"; for every child of God tries to cleanse, strip, and wash himself. I tried, night and day for many a month, to strip myself of these filthy garments, and to wash; but what did I see? Why, I seemed to accumulate more filth, to get worse instead of better, dirtier instead of cleaner, and more rags about me and upon me instead of losing them. O the helplessness of such a man! A person in this condition is longing to be stripped, cleansed, clothed, and is standing here waiting for all this to be done. He feels more like Satan than like Christ. Did it not seem much more likely that Joshua would go to hell than to heaven, that he would spend eternity with Satan and his angels instead of an eternity with Christ? Every sinner that can speak of grace

comes into this line of experience more or less. I can remember when it seemed far more likely that I should go to hell than to heaven. I seemed so like Satan and so unlike Christ. And so did Joshua; but, in spite of all this, he stood before the Angel. This is a sinner standing by faith at the footstool of divine mercy. Paul says: "By faith ye stand"(II Cor.i.24), and "we are saved by hope" (Rom.viii.24). Ah, sometimes it seems to resemble the case of him "who against hope believed in hope" (Rom.iv.18). I know it has been so with me.

Joshua stood before the Angel, and we have stood before the Angel. God has given us standing ground at His mercy seat; and, though Satan has thrust us to the ground for a time, as it were, and Christ may have seemed to look angrily at us as Joseph did at his brethren and may have appeared to speak angrily, He waits to be gracious. There are numbers who have been standing for months, it may be years, waiting for the Lord to speak graciously, and to cleanse and clothe them. May this be a word of encouragement in your ears!

Now to pass on, there is the cleansing. "And He answered and spake unto those that stood before Him, Take away the filthy garments from him." Who they are I am not prepared to say, but the Lord makes use of His ministers in the accomplishment of His works. "And unto him He (the Angel of the Lord, Jehovah-Jesus) said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." As though He had said "It is not the ministers on earth, nor the angels in heaven, but I Myself." God may use instruments, but the application is by His power alone; and so His redeemed people, His cleansed people, will give Him the glory, though they will esteem His ministers as instruments in His hand. It is God that puts poor sinners into the fountain, that applies Christ's precious blood to their hearts and consciences. God did it for Joshua, and Joshua knew it. If God has done it, it is done. By Jeremiah He says: "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for... and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found" (Jer.1.20). Some of us have had an experience of this already. God has taken away our sins; we have sought for them, and could not, for the time being, find them. There is no finding them when God takes them away, removes them as far as the east is from the west"(Psa.ciii.12).

Then there is the clothing: "I will clothe thee with change of raiment." It was a terrible change of raiment in Eden when Adam lost his bright garments and found those dim, dark, prison ones. They could not take them off, for they could not go to the end of the law. Christ has gone to the end of the law for His people (Rom.x.3), to save them from the filthiness of sin, to give them a change of raiment, and to save them from hell. What numbers there are who, "going about to

establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God... the righteousness which is of faith" (Rom.x.3,6). God's children pray for it; they count all things but loss in comparison with it, as did Joshua, Jeremiah, Paul, and all the family of God. Paul says; "I count all things but loss... that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil.iii.8,9). "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my Glory" (Isa.xlvi.13). Zion shall wear this raiment both in time and in eternity.

Then there was something more for Joshua. Yes; and, poor sinners, there is something more for you. The Lord does not stop here with cleansing and clothing Joshua. No; He goes on to say: "Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head." And so the servants of God nowadays would ministerially set a fair mitre upon the heads of God's people; but God must do it actually and really. I am talking about it, but, unless God makes use of me, it will not be done. What is this fair mitre? It is a sort of crown, or covering, for the head. Is a crown put upon the heads of God's people? Yes; and, if we are not crowned upon earth, we shall not be crowned in heaven. You know what David says of being crowned. And what did he mean? Did he mean that the crown of Judah, or the crown of Israel, was upon his head? He meant more than that. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Why? "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction:" And what else has He done? "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindnesses and tender mercies" (Psa.ciii.1,3,4). Oh, my friends, the lovingkindness and tender mercies of God, are not they a fair mitre? Are not they put upon the heads of His people? And do not they go to their very hearts? Do not they affect the entire man? Aren't they like the oil poured upon the head of the high priest? It flowed down to the very skirts of his garments (Psa.cxxxiii.2). So, then, when God puts a blessing upon the heads of His people, it affects them from head to foot: it gives them a longing for, and quickens their steps in going to the service of the sanctuary. This is God's way of working, leading His people to worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John iv.24).

"And the Angel of the Lord stood by." He saw every part of it rightly done. And does not He stand by with tender

mercy? If it is but an encouraging word, does not Jesus stand by? And don't you by faith perceive that He is standing by, that He is near and still smiling upon you, when He is speaking to you through His servants? And so, by lovingkindness or goodness flowing out, I understand the streams of God's love through the encouragements and blessings contained in the promises. Are not they a fair mitre? They are as pure as God is pure; they are rich and precious; they are valued by the Lord's people. O to have a crown, or a mitre, like this while we are sojourning here! How it produces resignation in one's soul! How it reconciles one's mind to the losses, crosses, trials, and bereavements, enables one to endure unto the end, to wait for that which is in store!

Further, we have Joshua in his official capacity. "And the Angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, If thou wilt walk in my ways." And will you not, Joshua - a cleansed, clothed, mitred, crowned one? Will you not walk in His ways? "Oh," says the child of God, "I wish I could walk a thousand times more faithfully than I do. And when God's truth touches my heart, when His grace bedews my soul, I will indeed walk in His ways." As one says:

"And now my willing footsteps move
In Thy delightful ways." (429)

You cannot do otherwise. As He draws, you will run; as He leads, you will follow. "If thou wilt," says the Angel. Is it something terrible, arduous, mortifying? asks the crowned one. "His commandments are not grievous" (I John v.3). And, more than that, "there is great reward" (Psa.xix.11). Not only is there heaven at the end, but there is a reward here. There is the approbation of a good conscience, the testimony of God in the soul. "If thou wilt keep my charge" - or ordinance, as it reads in the margin. What are His ordinances? His worship, the preaching of the gospel, the searching of the Scripture, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the communion of saints, and so on - these are His ordinances. Some poor souls who are blessed of God, and are anxious to keep His ordinances, are often afraid to be baptized lest they should bring some reproach upon God's name, word, and cause; or afraid lest they should not be really and truly Christians, and so deceive themselves or others. There are many things which keep the child of God back; but when the Lord draws, then we run, and nothing can keep us back. O that some in this congregation may feel the Lord's constraining love working in their hearts, that they may run after Him and so keep His charge!

Then, in reference to Joshua's official capacity, the Lord says: "Thou shalt also judge my house." I believe the Lord has reference here to those words of Paul: "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (I Cor.vi.3). Here is the bride. Who is chief of a house next to the husband? Who stands next to me in my house? Who stands next to you in your house? Why, the wife. Who shall judge the servants as the husband or the wife? Here they are. Here is the wife of the Redeemer. The elect angels are ministering servants. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" - be over them as the mistress of the house is above the servants. "And shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." And so, to my mind, there is an allusion to the future glory of the church of the living God.

Then the Lord goes on to say: "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at." Now that seems to be the sum of all things: "they are men wondered at." They are wondered at now. They wonder at themselves; all the family of God wonder at themselves, and they wonder that God should have mercy upon them more than upon others. Daniel Herbert wondered:

"Why me, why me, O blessed God,
Why such a wretch as me,
Who must for ever lie in hell
Were not salvation free?" (680)

Have you not wondered that you are not in hell, and cut down as cumberers of the ground? And has not the world wondered at you? I know they said to me many years ago that they would destroy my religion, that they would drive it out of me. Vital godliness in the heart of a sinner is, I believe, as immovable as the eternal God (Matt.xvi.18). They might as well try to roll the mountains into the seas as try to drive vital godliness out of the heart of a poor sinner when put there by God Himself. Ungodly husbands wonder at their wives, and ungodly wives at their husbands; parents at their children, and children at their parents. Hell wonders: the devil, I believe, wonders at the effects of redeeming love in the hearts of God's people. Heaven wonders: the angels in glory wonder (Psa.lxxi.7: I Cor. iv.9). It is indeed a wonder that a sinner should be snatched from hell, taken to heaven, united to Christ, to be His bride, His loved one for ever and for ever: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God... Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph.iii.10, 21).