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A S E R M O N

PREACHED

BY MR. KNILL,

AT

THE TEMPERANCE HALL, ANDOVER,

On the Evening of the 7th of January, 1874.

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”
—ROM. I. 16.

WE live in a solemn day of wide spreading empty profession of Christianity. Our Lord's words are being fulfilled: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matt. xxiv. 24.) Also, when the words uttered by the prophet Isaiah are being fulfilled: “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.” (Isa. iv. 1.) The greater part of the preaching in the present day is a *gospel*, not *the Gospel*,—a mixture of free will and free grace. In this epistle, the apostle is led to show the utter impossibility of salvation by works, either in whole or in part. And in his epistle to the Galatians he gives an account of the way in which he became an apostle (“not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” Gal. i. 1.) The apostle John also, in his first epistle (verses 1, 2, and 3), testifies to the church the things which he had seen with

his eyes, and handled with his hands (spiritually), of the word of life, that they may have fellowship with him. In the Acts of the Apostles (chap. 9) we have an account of the manner in which it pleased the Lord Jesus to arrest a persecuting Saul; and of the grace bestowed upon him, "turning him from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" so that when he reached Damascus, instead of haling men and women to prison for their profession of Christ, he went into the synagogue and preached the faith which he had been labouring to destroy; thus proving from the scriptures that that Jesus whom they had crucified was the very Christ. And in his epistle to the Galatians he says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. i. 8.)

What, then, is the Gospel of Christ? It contains good news, glad tidings, to poor perishing sinners. It originated in the sovereign good will and pleasure of Jehovah in his Trinity of Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—who, for the manifestation of their own glorious attributes and perfections, entered into covenant to bring about and secure the redemption of a number of the fallen race of Adam, upon whom the love of God had been from everlasting fixed. In this blessed covenant of life and peace, the Son of God was set up from everlasting as Mediator, Testator, and Surety. The fall of man, through the transgression of Adam, brought sin into the world, and death by sin; so that death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. Consequently the whole of Adam's posterity were involved in ruin, standing in themselves amenable to law and justice for their transgression.

But the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and the objects of his everlasting love, was not broken or dissolved through the fall. The church was the bride of Jesus from everlasting; therefore he, in order to redeem her from the curse of a broken law, and bring her from her state of sin and degradation, assumes

her nature, or as it is written: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb. ii. 14, 15.) And again: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. iv. 4, 5.) Christ himself, when conversing with Nicodemus, preached the Gospel to him: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii. 16.) In short, the Gospel is a revelation and a proclamation of the everlasting love of a covenant God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, fixed unalterably, upon a portion of the fallen race of Adam before the world began, according to that beautiful golden chain of truth recorded in the eighth chapter of the Romans: "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." It is not, therefore, "of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that showeth mercy." No. "He [Christ] loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. v. 25, 26, 27.) The church is God's building, himself the glorious Architect and Builder; Christ being the foundation and also the top stone,—the living stone, from which every stone composing that edifice derives its life and union.

Some persons may say, "If, then, this church or

people were chosen in Christ to salvation from everlasting, so that there is no peradventure respecting their safety and ultimate glorification, whence arises the necessity of preaching what is called the Gospel?" To this I reply, that God ordains both means and end. And "what, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." It pleases God "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Or, as it might be said, by the ministry of the word of truth God is pleased to convey unto his chosen the knowledge of salvation in its doctrines, promises, precepts, invitations, admonitions, and exhortations, as well as their individual and personal interest therein.

Under the Old Testament dispensation, the prophets may be called preachers, for "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Also he was preached in the various types, offerings, &c., under the Mosaic or Levitical dispensation.

But when the Great Antitype himself appeared, he preached in his own person his own Gospel. Thus did that prophecy receive its fulfilment, which we find in Isa. lxi., verses 1, 2; 3; also, we read of Christ ordaining and sending out his disciples to preach, giving them instruction where to go and what to preach; and at that time, in order to establish their authority, he gave them power to work miracles in his name. And their divine Master said to them, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." We also see the disciples obeying his command to tarry at Jerusalem after his ascension, until the time arrived for the fulfilment of the promise of the Father; namely, the descent of the Holy Ghost, by whose extraordinary gifts and grace they were qualified for that glorious work unto which they had been by him ordained. Just before his ascension to glory he gave them their commission: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe

all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The day of Pentecost was indeed a marvellous day, when there was such a display of almighty power attending the simple statement of Peter in reference to the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the despised Nazarene, the Lord Jesus. Three thousand poor sinners, at once "pricked in their hearts" with a feeling sight and sense of their sin, were made to cry out: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And it is added, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day were added unto them about three thousand souls." Thus was the preaching of the Gospel made instrumental in conveying to them a knowledge of their state as sinners; and also of their salvation by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel of which the apostle in my text declares he is not ashamed, having found it brought salvation into his own soul. And this is the Gospel which has been preached since that day up to the present time, by every one of those whom Christ, by his Spirit, has taught the knowledge of their utter ruin by the fall, and of their entire redemption therefrom by the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, "counting them faithful, *putting them into* the ministry." They neither qualify themselves for the ministry, nor do they *put themselves into* that sacred office. No man is qualified for a preacher of the Gospel who has not in his own soul an experimental acquaintance with it. Nor is every one that is favoured to know that joyful sound called to preach to others. It is a call distinct from a simple work of grace. Many, even good men, have fallen into a temptation of the enemy, that they have a call to this work, and, like Ahimaaz, ran before they were sent. This has not been followed with any glory

to Christ, nor profit to the people of God. We may have often heard the remark, that So-and-so is a good man, but is *not sent* to preach.

Seeing this is the case as respects good and gracious men, what can be said of those who stand up in this day as professed preachers of the Gospel? Men who have never been even called by grace, much less to the important and solemn work of the ministry. Men who knew nothing of the divine operation of the Spirit of God upon a sinner's heart in the conviction of sin, nor of the application, by the same power, of the atoning blood of Jesus; nor of the beauty, suitability, and necessity of his righteousness to justify. These are called by our Lord and Master, "Blind leaders of the blind." These are those presumptuous characters whom Christ will address at the last day with the awful words: "I never knew you; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." And yet they had the audacity to say to Christ, "Have we not prophesied [or preached] in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" The apostle knew them in his day, and styles them deceitful workers, transforming themselves as the apostles of Christ; and no marvel, as Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light. The enemy of souls is not just now going about as a roaring lion, but as a deceiver, deceiving poor sinners with an empty show, a mere outward form of godliness; thus "blinding the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The Gospel of Christ, therefore, is not a conditional or a contingent Gospel; that is, it is not *offered* to man for his acceptance or rejection; but it is "the power of God unto every one that believeth." O, say some, the word declares that he that believeth shall be saved. That is true; nevertheless *faith is not a condition*, but a grace—a free-grace gift. It is a fruit of the Spirit of God wrought in the hearts of God's elect; hence it is said to be the faith of God's elect—the faith of the operation of God that worketh by love, purifieth

the heart, and overcometh the world: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." As many as were ordained unto eternal life believed. "And the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."

The preaching of the Gospel is the great instrument by which the Lord is pleased to call his people out of darkness into light; and notwithstanding that many of his children have been regenerated without any outward means, yet afterwards they have, in common with others who have been quickened under the ministry of the word, been fed, strengthened, nourished, built up, and established in the faith by the preaching of the pure Gospel. Therefore the church of Christ do highly value a sound Gospel ministry when the trumpet gives a certain sound. Now, my friends, what do you know about the Gospel for yourselves? Salvation is a personal matter. The apostle exhorts to diligence, that we may make our calling and election sure. Not that it can be more sure than it is in reference to God; but that we may *know it for ourselves*. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God" hence; "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

While such vast multitudes of preachers and hearers advocate a Yea-and-nay Gospel, hating the sovereignty of God in the choice of his people, there are numbers of both preachers and hearers who have a sound creed, a clear knowledge of doctrinal truth, and who can argue with an opponent of these doctrines, yet have only the shell without the kernel, the form of sound words, the letter and not the spirit. They never were killed by a knowledge of the spirituality of the holy law of God; never wounded thereby with a feeling sight and sense of the evil and the guilt of sin and of the wrath of God revealed in a broken law. Consequently, all their knowledge of the law is in the letter; which knowledge may possibly work in them a measure of slavish fear and bondage, from which

they may have been relieved by a mere notional reception of the Gospel in the *letter only*. Such are described by our Lord as stony-ground hearers, who hear the word with joy, but not having any root in themselves, endure but awhile, and in time of temptation fall away. Moreover, there are those in the visible church who "hold the truth in unrighteousness," having a form of godliness, but denying the power. These profess that they know God, but in works deny him. The apostles Paul, Peter, and Jude, each speak of these awful characters as "spots in our feasts of charity. As trees twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Raging waves of the sea. As wandering stars, to whom is reserved the mist of darkness for ever." It may then be asked, how we shall know whether we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this Gospel of Christ has been *to us* the power of God unto salvation?

This is to be known by its effects. "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, teacheth us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world."

Before divine life from Christ enters the soul, a poor sinner is spoken of as being under the power of darkness, led captive by the devil at his will. Our Lord draws the awful picture: "When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he cometh upon him, he first binds the strong man, taketh from him his armour wherein he trusted, and then spoils his goods." Thus is that blessed scripture fulfilled (Isa. liii. 12): "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great; and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Therefore, my friends, if you have known the Gospel to be the power of God to your salvation, a mighty work has been done *in you*, as well as a wonderful work

done *for you*. When the word of God comes with power, it casts out the devil and the reigning power of sin; that whereas, previous to this, the man was either wrapped up in a delusive, empty profession, or living altogether in profanity. No hatred unto sin, but love to it. All his desires centering in the flesh or worldly things. An utter stranger also to a broken and a contrite spirit, consequently one whom our Lord describes as *whole*, not needing a physician.

Not so with that poor sinner in whose heart God, by his Spirit, begins to work. The axe (of the law) is laid to the root of the tree. It must come down. God brings down the high tree, but exalts the low tree. Nor does the Lord leave his work thus begun, but goes on to deepen in that man a conviction of sin, until he is brought to see and feel he is utterly ruined both by original and actual transgression, and as such, by the deeds of the law, there can be no justification. In the stripping-room a man learns the need of a better righteousness than that of Scribes and Pharisees; and also being under the sentence of condemnation, with a load of guilt upon his conscience, he finds all his efforts vain in removing that burden. There is but one way in which that condemnation and guilt can be taken away, and that is by the application of the blood of atonement—the precious blood of Christ. This, however, cannot be apprehended nor received but by faith, and this faith the gift of God.

Here it is that a man is convinced of *the sin of unbelief*. He can, indeed, believe the scripture to be the word of God; that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Saviour; and that his mission into this world was to save sinners. Yes, and all shall be saved for whom he died. But he can get no farther. Not being able of himself to do (as some legalists and workmongers tell him) to exercise faith for his own salvation, here he is a poor helpless thing, shut up under the sentence of death, until the blessed surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, appears, or manifests himself unto him as having shed his precious blood for the sins of his people, and en-

ables the poor leper to believe for himself. Now he knows that salvation is indeed of God, both in its origin and in its application. Now "the lame man leaps as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sings; because waters have broken out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert." Indeed, the meaning of that blessed 35th chapter of Isaiah is somewhat entered into.

He now can sing "the song of Moses and of the Lamb," "Old things are passed away; all things are become new." Some people think none can know that they shall go to heaven before they leave this world; that a man cannot know the forgiveness of all his sins, for it would have a tendency to beget carelessness in attending to the means or ordinances of God's house; or that he might sin that grace may abound. Those who thus think or speak show plainly that they are as yet unacquainted with the Gospel in the power of it.

There is in the glorious Gospel of Christ, when apprehended and received into the heart by faith of the operation of God, such an invincible, overcoming power which carries all before it. The apostle, speaking of the ministry of the Gospel, says, "For the weapons of our warfare" (namely, the word and Spirit of God) "are not carnal, but mighty *through God* to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

There is a power in true religion, a secret power and divine influence, not known nor felt by any other than those under the tuition of the Holy Ghost. This power is not, as some scoffers say, fanaticism. Nor is it a working upon the natural feelings—an excitement produced by natural causes. On that memorable day (the day of Pentecost), unto which I have already alluded, there were then present those scoffers who affirmed that Peter and the rest of the apostles were filled with new wine. But Peter said it was not so,

but that prophecy by Joel had its fulfilment, as it is written: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on mine handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (Acts ii. 17, 18.) Thus was the Gospel preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

And in no other way can the Gospel be effectually preached or profitably heard, without that Almighty Spirit. He it is that furnishes all the faithful ambassadors of Christ with their various gifts and graces, "dividing to every one severally as he will." There is not only a divine supernatural power felt, at times, in the hearts of the preachers while in their work, but there is a sweet overcoming, heart-cheering power realized by those hearers who have been quickened into life. Yes, there are some memorable seasons when those who sow and they who reap do rejoice together.

Now, my friends, do you know this Gospel in its effects? Wherever the Gospel comes in power, it not only *saves* but *sanctifies*. A man who rightly receives the Gospel desires to live and act under its influence. "For," says the apostle Paul, "the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again." The precepts are regarded equally with the promises, knowing that, although our salvation does not depend in any way upon our works, yet notwithstanding, our comfortable walking with God and peace of conscience cannot be had or maintained in a breach of any part of God's revealed will for our obedience. Indeed, the child of God has a nature implanted in regeneration that loves holiness. This is that of which the apostle makes mention in the

seventh chapter of Romans, last verse: "So then with *the mind* I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." This law of the mind is spoken of, in the epistle of John, as that which is born of God, and cannot sin. But as grace in this life does not annihilate or destroy sin, but subdues, resists, opposes, and overcomes it, there must necessarily be a daily warfare between two such opposites as sin and holiness, light and darkness, good and evil. Nor will this warfare end but with our natural life. It is, however, our mercy to find that whilst sin "hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. v. 21.)

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