

*The Gospel
in Ezekiel*



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The Gospel In Ezekiel

A Study of Thomas Guthrie's Work on Ezekiel 36

I. THE MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL

"Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Son of man. . .'"
—Ezekiel 36:16-17

*We see the **KINDNESS** of God to man:*

"God might have sent those angels to sow the Gospel, who shall descend at judgment to reap the harvest. . .yet theirs is little more than the pleasure of spectators."

*We see the **HONOR** conferred on man:*

"What honors does this world offer? What stars, what jeweled honors flash on her swelling breast, to be for one moment compared with those which they win on earth, and wear in heaven, who have turned souls from darkness to light—from the cursed power of Satan to the living God?"

"Viewed in the light of eternity, the church stands on a loftier elevation than the palace, and the pulpit offers man a grander position than the throne of empires."

"I think that he would not demean, but rather dignify his office, who should descend from a throne where subjects kneel, to bend his knee before God by a peasant's bed, or leave his palace for a cell, to watch, and weep, and pray with one whom crime had consigned to death."

"The man, however lowly his condition, who, some way between his cradle and the tomb, has converted even one soul to God, has not lived in vain, nor labored for nought; but has achieved a great work. He may be well content to go down into the grave by men unpraised, by the world unknown. His works, if they have not preceded, shall follow him. . .Others may have filled the world with the breath of their name; he has helped to fill heaven."

*We have an **EXHORTATION** addressed to man:*

"Thou art a 'son of man.' You bear the prophet's title. . .Let me call you to the prophet's office. The Master hath need—much need of you. Thousands, tens of thousands, are dying in their sins. . .Take a living, loving interest in souls. Don't leave them to perish."

*We see the **WISDOM** of God:*

"It is true that in us the instrument which God employs is in itself a humble one—in itself worthy neither of honor nor respect. The treasure is committed to earthen vessels, sometimes of the rudest form and the coarsest clay. What of that? If the letter from a

foreign land brings good tidings of his son, does the father quarrel with the meanness of the paper? While tears of joy and gratitude drop on the page, does he so much as notice it? If the dish offers safe or savory meat, a starving man enjoys it none the less that it is not served upon gold or porcelain.”

II. THE DEPRAVITY OF MAN

*“Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.”
—Ezekiel 36:17*

The SOURCE of sin's defilement:

The exile from Canaan points back to the exile from the garden. . .

“My eye is turned back on the day when our first parents, who had fallen into sin and forfeited their inheritance, were expelled from man's first home. . . The patience of God at length exhausted, as he 'drove' the man and woman from the garden, he drove Israel from a land which their sins had defiled.”

“Adam, the federal head of his family—they came not alone, but are followed by a longer and sadder procession than went weeping on the way to Babylon; they are followed by a world in tears. Cast out in them—in them condemned and expatriated—we all defiled the land wherein we dwelt.”

The REALITY of sin's defilement:

“Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep, and delivers the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who, with smiles on her face, and flattery on her tongue, stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality, and when suspicion sleeps, pierces our temples with a nail? When Siren is this, who, seated on a rock by the deadly pool, smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arms around our neck, to leap with us into perdition? . . . Who is it that makes man in his heart and habits baser than a beast; and him, who was once but little lower than an angel, but little better than a devil? Sin.”

“Your manners may have acquired a courtly polish; your dress may rival the winter's snow. . . your hands may bear no stain on them, yet they are not clean. . . It is not what lies without, but within, that defiles a man.”

“My very argument lies in this, that the brute beasts never present themselves in such a repulsive and revolting aspect.

The NATURE of sin's defilement:

* Sin's defilement is INTERNAL:

“The grass grows green upon a mountain that holds a volcano in its bowels. Behind the rosy cheek and soft lustrous eye of beauty, how often does there lurk a deadly disease, the deadliest of all!”

“There may be no very alarming appearance on the surface; in the conduct that lies exposed to the eyes of man there may be little offensive to holiness; yet this fair exterior affords no criterion, no sure or certain test by which to judge of matters within.”

“Think not that the evil is accidental—that it lies, as some say, in education, in temptation, in external causes: it is traceable to the heart itself.”

*Sin's defilement is **UNIVERSAL**:

“The tree is diseased, not at the top, but at the root; and, therefore, no branch of the human family can by possibility escape being affected by sin. Is anything more plain and palpable than this, that if the fountain was polluted, to whatever quarter of the world the stream of population flowed, it must have borne pollution in its bosom?”

*Sin's defilement is **INCURABLE**:

Jeremiah 13:23, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?”

“Of these solemn and humbling truths I know no more remarkable illustration than that before us. What effect had God's judgments on his ancient people? . . . Were they cured by their afflictions, trials, and years of suffering? . . . He sent them servants, and he sent them sufferings; but, until the Spirit of life descended from on high, their habits only grew more depraved, their condition more desperate, their profanity more profane.”

*Sin's defilement is **ORIGINAL**:

“You see, for example, a beautiful capital still bearing some of the flowers and foliage which the chisel of a master had carved upon the marble. It lies prostrate on the ground, half-buried among weeds and nettles; while beside it the arises from its pedestal the headless shaft of a noble pillar. Would you not conclude at once that its present position, so base, mean, and prostrate, was not its original position?”

*Sin's defilement is **ACTUAL**:

“You may deny Original, but can any man deny Actual Sin? . . . What! Is there no page of your history that you would obliterate—no leaf that, with God's permission you would tear from the book? Is there no action, nor word, nor wish of days gone by, that you would not, if you could, recall?”

*Sin's defilement is **INEXCUSABLE**:

“It is useless for the sinner to say that he is swept away by temptation. . . I know that Satan goes about seeking whom he may devour; but, while he tempts us, how often have we tempted him? . . . We have gone down to Delilah, we have stood in the way of sinners, we have sinned when we knew that we were sinning; we have gone where we knew that we were to sin; and, in pursuit of its guilty pleasures—trampling conscience beneath our feet, and more than that, the body and blood of Jesus Christ—we have done what the heathen never did, what Sodom and Gomorrah never did, what Tyre and Sidon never did—we have rejected a Savior, and madly refused eternal life.”

“If, indeed, you have no sins to answer for—if before this world's great assize you are prepared not only to plead, but to prove your innocence—if conscience accuses you in nothing, and excuses you in everything—then sleep on, in God's name sleep on, and take your rest. But when the heavens over men are clothed in thunders, and hell yawns beneath their feet, and both God's law and their own conscience condemn them, such indifference is madness! . . . Incalculable issues are at stake; your everlasting destiny may turn upon this hour.”

III. THE JUST WRATH OF GOD

“Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.”
—Ezekiel 36:18-19

God is SLOW to punish sin:

“He does punish; he shall punish; with reverence be it spoken, he must punish. Yet no hand of clock goes so slow as God's hand of vengeance.”

“Nor is it justice to God to forget how long a period of patience, and preaching and warning, and compassion, preceded that dreadful deluge. Long before the lightening flashed from angry heavens; long before thunders rolled along dissolving skies; long before the clouds rained down death. . .very long before this, God had been calling an impenitent world to repentance. . .It was not till Mercy's arm grew weary ringing the warning bell, that, to use the words of my text, God 'poured out his fury' on them.”

“God poured out his fury; but his indignation was the volcano that groans for days before it discharges the elements of destruction. . .The stroke of judgment is indeed, like the stroke of lightning, irresistible, fatal; it kills—kills in the twinkling of an eye. But the clouds from which it flashes are slow to gather, and thicken by degrees; and he must be deeply engaged with the pleasures, or engrossed in the business of the world, whom the flash and peal surprise. . .Heeded or unheeded, many are the warnings you get from God.”

God is JUST to punish sin:

“Slow goes the hand of justice; like the shadow on the sun-dial, ever moving, yet creeping slowly on, with a motion all but imperceptible. Still let sinners stand in awe. The hand of justice has not stopped, although imperceptibly, it steadily advances; by and by, having reached the tenth, eleventh, twelfth hour, the bells strikes. Then, unless you now flee to Christ, the blow which was so slow to fall shall descend on the head of impenitence with accumulated force. Let it never be forgotten, that although God's patience is lasting, it is not everlasting.”

“This city, nay the whole land, is shaken by the news of some most cruel, bloody, monstrous crime. Fear seizes hold of the public mind; pale horror sits on all men's faces; doors are double barred: [it is] justice [that] lets loose the hounds of law on the track of the criminal.”

God is GOOD to punish sin:

“That the community may live in peace. . .that the citizen may feel himself safe in the bosom of his family—that streets may be safe to walk on—that beds may be safe to lie in—that our land may be a country fit to live in—crime must be punished.”

God is LOVING to punish sin:

“How, it may be asked, does this consist with God's love and mercy? Now, there is no greater mistake than to suppose that God, as a God of justice and a God of mercy, stands in antagonism to himself. It is not mercy, but injustice, which is irreconcilable with justice. It is cruelty, not justice, that stands opposed to mercy.”

God has PROMISED to punish sin:

“God has threatened to punish sin, and, true to his word, shall pour out his fury on the

sinner's head. Christ is offered; and you cannot escape, if you neglect this great salvation. Had that truth been written only in one solitary passage—within the whole compass of the Bible had there been but one line to that effect—we might have succeeded in persuading ourselves that its sense was mistaken, and its terms misunderstood. But is it so? Ah, no! There is letter upon letter, 'line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.' God has recorded his irrevocable resolution, not in one, but in a hundred passages; and reiterated in a thousand ways the awful sentence — "The soul that sins, it shall die."

"Impenitent and unbelieving sinner! Flatter not thyself that God hath not seen, or doth not regard; fancy not that thy crimes are buried in a grave deeper than Naboth's, and that, as the dust of death lies on the lips of the partners or witnesses of thy guilt, therefore you may be at ease, since the dead tell no tales. The day is coming when every unpardoned sin shall find out its father—when what has been done in darkness shall be revealed in daylight, and the word whispered in the ear shall be published upon the housetop. Without a pardon, Jesus shall have no answer to us but one, the terrible reply of Jehu, 'What has thou to do with peace?'"

APPLICATION:

"It is alleged by travelers, that the ostrich, when pursued by its hunters, will thrust its head into a bush, and, without further attempt either at flight or resistance, quietly submit to the stroke of death. Men say that, having thus succeeded in shutting the pursuers out of its own sight, the bird is stupid enough to fancy that it has shut itself out of theirs, and that the danger, which it has concealed from its eyes, has ceased to exist. We doubt that. . . It is because escape is hopeless and death is certain that it has buried its head in that bush, and shut its eyes to a fate which it cannot avert. To man—rational and responsible man—belongs the folly of closing his eyes to a fate which he may avert, and thrusting his head into the bush while escape is possible; and, because he can put death, and judgment, and eternity out of mind, living as if there were neither a bed of death nor bar of judgment. Be wise; be men. Look your danger in the face. Anticipate the day when you shall behold a God in judgment and a world in flames; and now flee to Jesus from the wrath to come. This your plea— 'Almighty God! Of my own works I have nothing to say but this—what is bad in them is mine; what is good in them is thine. Behold this pardon—look on this robe, and know now whether it be thy Son's coat or no.'"

IV. GOD'S MOTIVE IN SALVATION

"But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."'"
—Ezekiel 36:21-23

A Necessary QUALIFICATION:

Though it be true: "God cherishes, indeed, such respect to his own glory, that, had the salvation of the world been incompatible with that—this world had been left to perish."

Yet still: "Never. . . let us exalt this doctrine of the divine glory, at the expense of the divine love."

The Glorious TRUTH:

*What God's motive in salvation is NOT:

“God saves sinners, not for their sakes, or out of any regard whatever to their worth or merits. Why, then, it may be asked, choose the same text, and expatiate again on the same theme? If I needed apology or defense for lingering on this humbling, but most salutary and important subject, I would find it in a high example. Observe how Moses, in his dying address to Israel, repeats and repeats, iterates and reiterates, this very truth. . .”

Deuteronomy 9:1,4-5,6: “Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven. . . Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land. . . Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.”

*What God's motive in salvation IS:

“The truth is, that God saves man for much the same reasons as at first he made him. . . the motive which moved God to save man was regard to his own glory.”

“Men's chief end is to glorify God; and God's chief end is to glorify himself.”

*God could have glorified himself in our DESTRUCTION:

“Two methods of glorifying his name are open to God. He is free to choose either. . . In *EGYPT*, for instance, he was glorified in the high-handed destruction of his enemies; and, in the same land, by the high-handed salvation of his people. In the one case he proved how strong his arm was to smite, and in the other how strong it was to save.”

“In like manner, God sanctified his name on the plains of *SODOM*. He sanctified it, on the one hand, in the destruction of his enemies, and on the other, in the salvation of Lot.”

“Can it be doubted, that the measure meted out to *FALLEN ANGELS*, God might have meted out to men? Sanctifying his great name in our ruin, rather than in our redemption.

*But instead God chooses to glorify himself in our REDEMPTION:

“And as, in such cases, man's glory is more illustrated by curing than by killing, so God's glory is more preeminent in our redemption than it had been in our final and everlasting ruin.”

APPLICATIONS:

*For the UNBELIEVER:

“Man must be emptied of self before he can be filled with grace.”

“let me warn you, that what God *might* have done with all, he *shall* do with some—with all indeed who despise, or refuse, or neglect this great salvation. . . If you are not good for fruit, you shall serve for fuel. . . This day, I set before you life and death.”

*For the BELIEVER:

“As the tree grows best skyward that grows most downward, the lower the saint grows in humility, the higher he grows in holiness. The soaring corresponds to the sinking. . . I

have always thought, that none are so sure to lie in Jesus' bosom as those I have seen lying lowest at Jesus' feet."

"Would you be holy? You must be humble. Would you be humble? Oh! Never forget that the magnet which drew a Savior from the skies, was not your merit but your misery."

*For ALL:

"If God saves—not because we deserve mercy—but that his own great mercy may be illustrated in saving—ah—then there is hope for me!"

A Remaining QUESTION: HOW is it that God is glorified in salvation?

*In redemption God's POWER is glorified:

"Punishment is confessedly easier than reformation. Nothing is more easy than to rid society of a criminal by the hand of an executioner; but to soften his stony heart, to get him to fall in love with virtue, to make him an honest, honorable, kind, and tender man, to guide his erring steps from the paths of crime—ah—that is another thing! . . . The power of Divinity culminates in grace."

*In redemption God's WISDOM is glorified:

"In redemption this wisdom is preeminent. . . the Savior of man is called 'the wisdom of God'. . . Can any doubt the propriety of the language, who reflects but for a moment of what a hard task wisdom was set—what a difficult problem she was called to solve—when man was to be saved? . . . she was called upon to invent a plan whereby justice might be fully satisfied, and yet the guilty saved. The highest intelligences had been at fault here—they might well have asked, who is sufficient for these things? . . . There never entered into other mind than God's a plan, or shadow of a plan, by which sweet Mercy might be espoused to stern Justice, and God—in the luster of untarnished holiness, and the majesty of a vindicated law—might appear, as he appears in Jesus, the 'just and yet the justifier of the ungodly.' "

*In redemption God's HOLINESS is glorified:

"[God's] hatred of sin is, beyond doubt, much more fully expressed by the very way in which he saves the sinner; more fully expressed in redemption, than if, executing relentless vengeance, with an eye that knew no pity, and with a hand that would not spare, he had made an utter end of sinners. . . in our judgment, the holiness of God shines very conspicuously in this, that, even when sin was associated with his beloved Son, it appeared none the less vile in his eyes. . . Love would have spared the pains of a beloved Son, but it is met and mastered by God's hatred of sin."

*In redemption God's JUSTICE is glorified:

"His justice is as conspicuous in redemption as the cross which illustrated it. Sinners, indeed, are pardoned, but then, their sins are punished; the guilty are acquitted, but then, their guilt is condemned; the sinner lives, but then, the surety dies; the debtor is discharged, not, however, till the debt is paid."

Justice and the UNBELIEVER: "Observe, I pray you, that in regard to the lost, and her claims upon them, justice, in a sense, is never satisfied. The pains of hell do not, cannot exhaust the penalty. . . Mysterious debt! A debt ever paying, yet never paid."

Justice and the BELIEVER: "Believer! Lift up thy drooping head. . . He is faithful and

just to forgive us our sins.' In consideration of a Redeemer's righteousness, God shall crown thee; in the righteousness that is on thee, [He shall] reward the work of his Son. . . . Jesus shall receive the full payment of His wages, and justice shall reward a Savior in the saved."

*In redemption God's GRACE is glorified:

"We pity simple suffering; but let pity and love be extended to *guilty* suffering, and you have now the very element of mercy. Mercy is the forgiveness of an injury; mercy is the pardon of a sinner. Smiling when justice frowns, and extending her favors out and beyond those who are merely without merit, she bestows them on those who are full of demerit. . . the objects of pity are sufferers who have been unfortunate; the objects of mercy are sufferers who have been guilty."

* In redemption God's TRUTH is glorified:¹

The Lord has bound himself by solemn oath to uphold the promises made to Abraham (see Gen.15:8-21). Likewise, when the Lord brought His people out of the land of Egypt, He confirmed to them His oath to bring them into the land of Canaan (see Ex.6:6-8). We read in Ezekiel 20:5-9 that it was this oath that kept Him from destroying them in the wilderness. He had bound his own name and character together in the promises He made to His people. His own name was at stake in keeping those promises. And we have the same glorious truth bound together with our salvation in Jesus. God will fulfill every promise He has made to those in Christ—not because of how little we sin today or how faithful we'll be tomorrow—but because His own name is at stake in upholding the truth of His promises (see also Ex.32:11-14).

V. THE NATURE OF SALVATION

*"For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land."
-Ezekiel 36:24.*

The AUTHOR of grace:

"Man had as little to do with saving as with making himself."

The POWER of grace:

"Gold and silver are the emblems of God's people. And as by some power in nature God has separated these emblems from the base and common earths, even so by the power of his grace he will separate all his chosen from a reprobate and rejected world. They shall come at his call."

"His grace shall prove sufficient for the work. No doubt it has a great work to do. . . .An old writer has said that 'man in his natural state is half a devil and half a beast.' How wonderful the grace which changes such a monster into the image of God, and converts the basest metal into the purest gold!"

The OBJECTS of grace:

"No man yet was ever driven to heaven; he must be drawn to it."

"when all earthly schemes are foundered, and life itself becomes a wreck—plunging us amid the billows of eternity's shore—and this old world itself is broken up like a worn out and

¹ This aspect was added by the editor.

stranded ship—then, at the last day's muster, all who are Christ's shall be there, not one of them shall be missing; sooner or later, all shall reach the heavenly coast.”

“But my text tells us not only that He will gather his people, but gather them 'out of all countries'. . . The gospel belongs to no country, but to all.”

“We may be astonished to miss some in heaven whom we calculated on meeting there, we shall be astonished to see some there whom we never expected.”

The PROMISE of grace:

“We are assured that God will bring all His people to glory, by the fact that his own honor, as well as their welfare, is concerned in the matter. . . God's honor, and truth, and covenant, are all concerned—are, so to speak, compromised to make good the promise, that he will bring his redeemed to glory. It is, in deed, no easy work to bring believers safe to glory. When I think of the sins to be forgiven, and the difficulties to be overcome, the wonder seems not that few get to heaven, but that any get there. . . knowing what we know, and feeling what we feel, how entirely may we acquiesce in the old remark, that the greatest wonder we shall see in heaven, shall be to see ourselves there. Yet let Christians take comfort. Your good and God's glory ever run in the same direction.”

VI. JUSTIFICATION

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.” —Ezekiel 36:25

The OBJECTS of justification: UNCLEAN SINNERS

“God's people are not chosen because they are holy. They are chosen that they may become holy, not because they have become so. It is after God elects that God justifies, as it is after he has justified that he sanctifies. This appears—stands out—most visibly in the very terms of the text, *“then I will sprinkle clean water upon you.”*

“Without holiness no man shall see God. . . We say so to all men—to the sovereign on his throne we say, Without holiness thou shalt never wear a crown in heaven; to the minister in his pulpit we say, Without holiness thou shalt never minister before the Throne—thou mayst save others, but shalt be thyself a castaway; to the communicant at the Lord's table we say, Without holiness thou shalt never sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb; thou mayst drink of the juice of the grape—but shalt never drink the new wine of his 'Father's kingdom' . . . You may have his name; but that is worth nothing; unless with the name you have the nature of Him who was holy, harmless, and undefiled. . . You are not to be justified by your works, but you *are* to be tried by them. . . You may be saved *from* your sins, you cannot be saved *in* your sins. . . Cast your sins—these Jonah's—overboard, we say, If these abide you cannot be saved.”

“Now, while maintaining, to the utmost, that holiness is essential to salvation, we nevertheless regard it as of the highest importance that holiness should have a right and not a wrong place in our system. . . And they commit a fatal mistake who build election upon holiness—not holiness upon election; who regard good works not as the result but the cause of God's mercy. This is a delusion of the enemy of souls. Would you make yourselves more pure and more penitent, that you may have some right to divine mercy? You are trying to weave ropes of sand. It was the very want of these things, which, if I may so speak, carried your election. It was your wretchedness that saved you. God chooses his people, not because they are holy, but to make them so.”

The AUTHOR of justification: GOD HIMSELF

“How is a sinner made clean? Through the application of what is here called clean water. And by whom, according to the text, is that water applied? It is applied *to* the sinner, not *by* the sinner. To God, as Author and Finisher of our faith, the whole glory of salvation belongs; for, observe how he says in my text: *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean.*’ In redemption, the saved are not justified by themselves, but by God.”

“God deals with us as Jesus did with Simon Peter. Peter will walk the sea to show off his power and prove his superiority to the other disciples. His Master lets him try it. Jesus bids him come; not that he may drown Simon, but drown Simon's pride. Painful but profitable lesson! His danger and failure have taught him his weakness, and he cries, ‘Lord, save me, I perish.’ Now, to this state, and this very confession, all who are saved must first be brought. ‘I perish’ is a saving word. ‘I perish,’ like the cry of the child in the natal chamber, is the first utterance of a new existence.”

“Are you engaged in the attempt to work out a righteousness of your own? Leave that loom. The robe of righteousness, a raiment meet for thy soul, and approved of by God, was never woven there. It was wrought upon the cross; and, of color more enduring than Tyrian purple, it is dyed red in the blood of Calvary. Come away, and come to Jesus. Come as you are. There is neither time nor need for delay.”

The BASIS of justification. . .

*What it is NOT: *WATER BAPTISM*

“We are not justified or cleansed from the guilt of sin through the administration or efficacy of any outward ordinance. Thousands go to heaven without baptism. Thousands, alas—perish with it. Baptism attaches us to the visible church; admits to that, and is its door of entrance; but, while it unites to the body of professing believers, it does not of necessity form any living attachment between us and the Savior.”

“Look at Simon Magus! He was baptized by apostolic hands; and in his case the ordinance, beyond all doubt and controversy, was duly administered. But does his conduct warrant us to believe that his sins were pardoned, or his heart renewed? By no means. Besides, does not the sad and melancholy history—alas—of thousands prove that the outward ordinance is often administered without any corresponding administration of renewing grace? The altar and the offering are there, but no fire descends from heaven on the sacrifice. Is it not an undeniable and melancholy fact, that the lives of persons in all churches—even of the most transcendental in their claims—demonstrate that many are baptized with water who have never been baptized with the Holy Spirit? The question, therefore, that we would urge on your most serious consideration, does not concern the sign, but the thing signified. Have you got the grace of God? In the words of an apostle, ‘Have you received the Holy Spirit?’”

*What it IS: *THE CROSS OF CHRIST*

“Without the shedding of blood there is no remission; and none, we may add, without its application. Water is but the sign of spiritual blessings. It stands here the figure of that which cleanses. The object to be cleansed is the soul; the defilement to be cleansed away is sin; and we now, therefore, address ourselves to the all-important question: Of what is this water the figure? The key to the question lies in the epithet *clean* water. Observe, it is not said, then I will sprinkle water, but *clean* water on you, and you shall be clean.’ After the red heifer was reduced to ashes, those ashes, carefully collected, were mixed with pure water in a pure vessel—and that water is the clean water of my text (*see Numbers 19:9*). See now how plainly—when understood aright—this expression refers to a vicarious

sacrifice, and the merits of an atoning death.”

“Our Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' Now, as commonly understood, these words refer only to the renewing of the Holy Spirit. We venture to think, that on that occasion, and in these words, our Lord preached the gospel more fully. Turn the light of my text upon them, read them in connection with it, understand by the water of Christ's address the water of my text, and his language to Nicodemus expands into a full gospel. Let our Lord, in speaking to Nicodemus—who as a Jew would at once catch the allusion—have an eye to the clean water of the ceremonial law; let the water there refer, like the water here, to an atoning sacrifice, and the gospel in that celebrated passage shines forth in its effulgent radiance.”

*** APPLICATION:**

“Let me warn you, that although there is but one way of getting to heaven, there are two ways of missing it; and what—at first seems strange—these two ways go off in opposite directions; the one to this side and the other to that. This doctrine of salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ will—God blessing and enabling you to believe it—guard you against both errors—on this side against presumption, and on that against despair. I cannot say that hell is but the dream which haunts a guilty conscience. No, it would be no kindness to spread a covering over the pit. It is an awful thought, that pit; it is an awful reality, that pit; and this is an awful declaration, 'The wicked shall be cast into hell, and all the nations that fear not God.' But over against these stern declarations, and between the pit and you, a high red cross is standing. Mercy descends from heaven, lights upon its summit, and preaches hope to despair, pardon to guilt, salvation to the lost.”

VII. REGENERATION

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” —Ezekiel 36:26

The NECESSITY of regeneration:

“We believe that the purest, gentlest, loveliest, most amiable creature that blesses fond parents, and adorns earth's happiest home—one of nature's fairest flowers—stands as much in need of a new birth as the vilest outcast who walks these streets—the lost one, whose name is never mentioned but by broken hearts and in wrestling prayers to God. The best of mankind are so bad that all have need to be born again.”

“Sin is a disease which our constitution has no power to throw off; and which no human skill can remove. God himself—with whom in a sense all things are possible, and to whom nothing is too hard—does not attempt its repair. In the work of conversion, it is not an old heart which is to be mended, but a new one which is to be given.”

The NATURE of regeneration:

*** How it is DESCRIBED:**

1) *A CREATION:* “In many respects, the new creation corresponds with that old one—the Paradise Regained with the Paradise Lost. Man is the subject of both; his good and the divine glory are the end of both; devils are the enemies, and angels are the allies of both; [and] the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the authors of both.”

2) *A BIRTH:* “This is the second birth; aye, and infinitely the better of the two. Better—

because in that a son of man is born but for the grave, whereas in this a son of God is born for glory. Better—because the march of these little feet is along a rough path between a cradle and a coffin; whereas, the way of grace, however full of trials, toil, and battle, is from the pangs of birth onward and upward to a crown in heaven.”

3) *A RESURRECTION*: “Because the change which conversion works on the soul is inexpressibly great, it borrows a name from that mighty change; that, a resurrection of the body from the grave, this, a resurrection of the soul from sin. The greatness of the change is set forth in the symbolical representation of it in the next chapter. Ezekiel, after preaching, prayed; and there came from heaven a living and life-giving breath. That was a great change, and not less great the work of grace in conversion.

*What it is NOT: *MERE MORAL DECENCY*

“Virtue is cheap; vice is costly; and, proving a heavy tax upon the purse, destructive of health, and damaging to character, we have seen self-interest turn a man from the indulgence of his strongest vices. Old age cools hot blood. As by sleight of hand and necromantic trick, Egypt's magicians produced a set of mimic miracles, that were clever counterfeits of those which God wrought by the hand of Moses, may not other causes than true love of holiness or godly hatred of sin work such an outward, as bears some considerable likeness to a saving change? In matters of religion, beware of confounding an *almost* with an *altogether* Christian. Oh, let us not fall into the fatal mistake of confounding an outward reformation with that divine, inward, eternal transformation which is wrought by the Spirit.”

*What it IS: *A RADICAL CHANGE IN THE INWARD MAN*

1) *The OLD HEART that is taken away:*

*Is **COLD** as a stone: “Coldness is characteristic of a stone. But what stone so cold as that in man's breast? Colder by far by nature is this heart of ours to God and Christ. We are born lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. The carnal mind is enmity against God; is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

*Is **HARD** as a stone: “Fire melts wax, but not stone; water softens clay, but not stone; a hammer bends the stubborn iron, but not stone. Stone resists these influences; and, emblem of a heart crushed, but not sanctified by affliction, it may be shattered into fragments, or ground to powder, yet its atoms are as hard as ever. Man *can* be saved; but he can only be saved, because there is nothing impossible to God.

*Is **DEAD** as a stone: “It has no vitality, no feeling, no power of motion. The stone is deaf, and dumb, and dead. Speak to it, it returns no answer; weep to it, it sheds no tears. Now, how many sit in the house of God as unmoved? Is it not sad to think that more tears are shed in playhouses than in churches? What a deplorable account of the human heart! Human nature is bad enough without exaggerating its evils. There is no need to exaggerate them. Man is not dead to many tender and lovely emotions of nature. Many beauties are lingering about this ruin—the engaging, but melancholy vestiges of its former glory. It is no treason against the gospel to believe that one, yet unhappily a stranger to the grace of God, may be endowed with many most pleasant and lovely virtues. Let there be no mistake, then; when I speak of the heart as a stone—I am looking at it as it looks on God, a Savior, salvation, and eternity.

2) *The NEW HEART that is given in Christ:*

“I have already explained why the heart is described as a stone. It is cold as a stone; hard as a stone; dead and insensible as a stone. Now, as by the term 'flesh' we

understand qualities the very opposite of these.”

*Is a **WARM** heart. “This new heart mainly consists in a change of the affections as they regard spiritual objects. The Apostle pronounces men to be by nature lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. This world is his god; his heaven is on earth; the paradise he seeks is here. Now, if you have received a new heart, this state is past, or is passing. Your affections are not dried or frozen up; they are as warm, or rather warmer than ever—still flowing, only flowing toward different objects, and in a different channel. In obedience to a divine impulse, their course is not only in a different, but in a contrary direction; for the grace of God works such a complete change of feeling, that what was once hated you now love, and what was once loved you now loathe; you fly from what once you courted, and pursue what you once shunned. When faith receives the Savior, how does the heart warm to Jesus Christ! All the old indifference to his cause, his people, and the interests of his kingdom, has passed away; and now these have the warmest place in a believer's bosom, and are the objects of its strongest and tenderest affections.”

*Is a **SOFT** heart: “As 'flesh,' it is soft and sensitive. It is flesh, and feels alike the kiss of kindness and the rod of correction. It is flesh; and no longer a stone, hard, obdurate, impenetrable to the genial influences of heaven. A stone no longer, it melts under the heavenly fire—a stone no longer, it bends beneath the hammer of the word; no longer like the rugged rock, on which rains and sunbeams were wasted, it receives the impression of God's power, and retains the footprints of his presence.”

*Is a **LIVING** heart: “With Christ living in his heart, the believer feels that now he is not himself—not his own; and, as another's, the grand object of his life is to live to Christ. In the highest sense alive, he is dead—dead to things he was once alive to; and he wishes that he were more dead to them—thoroughly dead. He wishes that he could look on the seductions of the world, and sin's voluptuous charms, with the cold, unmoved stare of death, and that these had no more power to kindle a desire in him, than in the icy bosom of a corpse.

*APPLICATIONS:

A QUESTION: “Have you any experience of it? Is there such a heart in you? Having cast away every sin to embrace Christ, do you set him above your chiefest joy? Has this change taken place in you? Are you other than once you were? Rather than be what once you were, would you prefer not being at all? Would you prefer annihilation to your old corruption? Can you say, I am not what once I was?”

An ADMONITION: “To feel our need of a new heart, and to feel that this old one will not mend nor make better, is, in fact, the first step in salvation; and the deeper our impression of the reality of the truth, the more diligently shall we labor, and the more earnestly shall we pray to be renewed.”

A COMFORT: “Sin never changes. And if what was once lovely looks loathsome now—if what was once desired is detested now, if what was once sought we now shun and shrink from, it is not because sin is changed, but—blessed be God, and praise be to his grace—we are changed.”

VIII. CONVERSION

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” —Ezekiel 36:26-27

The NATURE of conversion:

“In conversion God gives *a new spirit* (v26). While the heart ceases to be dead, the head, illuminated by a light within, ceases to be dark; the understanding is enlightened; the will is renewed; and our whole temper is sweetened and sanctified by the Spirit of God.”

* A radical change of the MIND:

“Sin is the greatest folly, and the sinner the greatest fool in the world. There is no such madness in the most fitful lunacy. Think of a man risking eternity and his everlasting happiness on the uncertain chance of surviving another year. Think of a man purchasing a momentary pleasure at the cost of endless pain. Think of a dying man living as if he were never to die. Conversion not only restores God to the heart, but reason also to her throne.”

* A radical change of the WILL:

“Bad men are worse, and good men are better than they appear. In conversion the will is so changed and sanctified, that although a pious man is in some respects less, in other respects he is more holy than the world gives him credit for. The attainments of a believer are always beneath his aims; his desires are nobler than his deeds; his wishes are holier than his works. Give other men their will—full swing to their passions—and they would be worse than they are; give that to him, and he would be better than he is. And if you have experienced the gracious change, it will be your daily grief that you are not what you not only know you *should* be, but what you *wish* to be.”

“When God changes the condition of his creatures, he accommodates their will to the change. Take, for example, the painted butterfly. It has a will as well as wings to fly. The change within corresponds to the change without. It spurns the ground; and, as you may gather from its merry, mazy dance, the creature is happy, and delights in the new duties which it is called to perform. Even so it is in that change which grace works in sinners. The nature of the redeemed is so accommodated to the state of redemption, their wishes are so fitted to their wants, their hopes to their prospects, their aspirations to their honors, and their will to their work, that they would be less content to return to polluted pleasures than this beautiful creature to be stripped of its silken wings, and condemned to pass its days amid the old, foul garbage, its former food. With such a will and nature as they now possess, their old life would be misery—would be hell. Even so God's people would rather not be at all, than be what once they were.”

* A radical change of the TEMPER:

“Grace sweetens where it sanctifies. Never had the disciples gone forth 'conquering and to conquer,' had they brought their old bigoted, quarrelsome, unsanctified temper to the mission. They might have died for Christianity, but she had died with them; and, bound to their stake, and expiring in their ashes, she had been entombed in the sepulcher of her first and last apostles.”

“Happy man! Although his fare be but a crust of bread and cup of water, he dines every day at heaven's royal table. Pitying the poverty of riches, the meanness of rank, the littleness of greatness—envying no man his high acquaintances, coveting no man's large estates—all he needs is to wear his honors meekly; with a rank higher than kings possess or kings can bestow.”

The AGENT of conversion:

“The Father *decrees* redemption; the Son *procures* it; the HOLY SPIRIT *applies* it.

“It is 'the gift of God.' Saving faith has God for its AUTHOR, the Spirit for its AGENT, Christ for its OBJECT, grace for its ROOT, holiness for its FRUIT, and heaven for its REWARD.”

“The Holy Spirit is the great agent in conversion and sanctification. Man cannot be saved unless elected, nor elected without the Father; nor saved unless redeemed, nor redeemed without the Son; nor saved unless converted, nor converted without the Spirit.”

The BASIS of conversion:

“Do you ask, by way of objection, do not God's people escape suffering—commit sin, and yet escape the penalty? True. But their exemption from future punishment forms no exception to this rule. In their case, indeed, the debtor escapes, but then the creditor is paid. The sufferings from which they are exempted were endured by their substitute, and in a suffering Savior their sins were punished: He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.”

The INSTRUMENT of conversion:

“We preach, indeed, a free and full salvation; and we glory in the theme. We say that the greatest law-breaker may be saved; the foulest sinner washed white as snow; the basest of the base, the vilest of the vile, exalted to a throne in heaven; and that as no obedience rendered to the law since the fall of Adam can open heaven to fallen man, so since the death of Christ no disobedience can shut its gates against him. We say with Paul, 'It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' Blessed be God, the law, so stern-like in a sinner's eyes, no longer carries the keys of heaven. Purchased by his blood, they are in the custody of him who is very pitiful and of great mercy, and who—never turning a deaf ear to the cry of human distress—cheers the expiring hours of guilt, and said even to a thief, 'Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.'”

The PURPOSE of conversion:

“We are delivered that we may serve God; serve him better, serve him holier; serve him, as Paul also says, 'in the newness of the Spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.'”

IX. SANCTIFICATION

“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” —Ezekiel 36:27

Its NATURE:

*The Christian grows **BY DEGREES**:

“It is a *progressive* obedience. To 'walk' is expressive of *progress* in grace.”

1) A COMFORT: “Does the infant who is learning to walk abandon the attempt, or yield to despair, because its first efforts are so feeble, and so often fail of success? If not, why then should we despond, because, in attempting to walk in God's ways, we often stumble, and not seldom fall? In such distressing circumstances, our children become our teachers. God ordains strength out of the mouth of babes, and the lesson of the nursery is

invaluable. Learning in that school that walking is a progressive and not a sudden attainment, I get heart to say with David, 'Why art thou cast down, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?'"

2) AN EXHORTATION: "This image stimulates to exertion, as well as comforts under failure. In attempting to walk, the child falls; there is blood upon its brow, and tears in its eye. Does it lie there just to weep? By no means. Recovering from the alarm, and soon forgetting its wounds, it seeks the floor again. We teach our children; let us here be their scholars, and take a lesson from the nursery. Take more pains and give more prayer to learn this holy art. Let the perseverance of the nursery be imitated by the church. Let our knees be as much employed in prayer, and our powers and hours in attempting a holy life, as those of infancy in learning to walk."

*The Christian grows **BY ACTIVITY**:

"Avoid and abjure every scene, pleasure, pursuit, which experience has taught you tends to sin, dulls the fine set edge of conscience, unfits for religious duties or religious enjoyments, sends you prayerless to bed or dull and drowsy to prayer. Never fear to suffer; but oh—fear to sin. It is not safe to bring gunpowder within reach even of a spark. The seed of the woman has, indeed, bruised the head of the serpent; yet beware—the reptile is not dead."

"Let me also warn you that such a holy life as the text enjoins, is impossible to all but those who are on their guard against the beginnings of evil. Take alarm at an evil thought, wish, desire. The experience of all good men proves that sin is most easily crushed in the bud, and that it is safer to flee from temptation than to fight it."

"The strongest trees grow not beneath the glass of a greenhouse, or in the protection of sheltered and shaded valleys. The stoutest timber stands on Norwegian rocks, where tempests rage, and long, hard winters reign. And is it not with the Christian as with the animal life also? Exercise gives health, and strength is the reward of activity. The muscles are seen fully developed in the brawny arm that plies the ringing hammer, and most powerfully developed in the limbs of him who increases his strength by spending it. Even so, the most vigorous and healthy piety is that which is the busiest, which has difficulties to battle with, which has its hands full of good works, which has—I may say—neither time nor room for evil, but aiming at great things, both for God and man, promptly, summarily dismisses temptation, with Nehemiah's answer: 'I have a great work to do, therefore I cannot come down.'"

Its NECESSITY:

"This willing and progressive obedience is the sign and seal of salvation. The descent of the Spirit is still the evidence of sonship; its sign, however, is not a dove perched upon their heads, but the dove nestled within their hearts. By his Spirit God creates them 'anew in Jesus Christ unto good works;' and by these—by the fruits of a holy life, by the joys of a Holy Ghost, by the advancing stages of a holy progress—his Spirit witnesses with their spirits that they are sons of God. A witness this, as certain, and therefore as satisfactory, as the voice of the skies, or the verdict of final judgment. The fruit is now, as it shall be hereafter, the test of the tree. I do not say that saints will not fall into sin, but I do say that, even when they are so unhappy, there will be an unmistakable difference between them and the ungodly. Judas sinned, and went and hanged himself; Peter sinned, and went out and wept. The sins of saints are the occasion of saintly sorrows. God shall see them at the fountain weeping and washing away their guilt in the blood of Jesus; and to Jesus himself they will go, to make on their knees the confession of Peter—Lord, I know that I have sinned, I know that I am a great sinner; yet 'thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'"

Its MOTIVES:

“This world—with so many living and dying in it without God and hope, with the whole heathen world still unconverted, with thousands and tens of thousands at home sunk in the deepest ignorance, and slaves of the vilest sins, with members of our families or of friendly circles far from God, and between whom and us—terrible thought—death would make an eternal separation—has much need that we were up and doing, and throwing ourselves into the cause of active Christianity. Our opportunities of good are many and multiform. A Christian man should feel like some strong swimmer, who has hundreds around him sinking, drowning, shrieking for help; the difficulty is to make selection, and on whose unhappy head first to lay a saving hand. Amid such scenes and calls, oh, it is lamentable to think how much of our time has been frivolously and uselessly spent. 'The time past of our lives has been more than sufficient to have wrought the will of the flesh;' to have enjoyed our own ease, made money, and secured for ourselves the comforts of life. To nobler ends be its remaining sands devoted! Take Christ for your copy. Run in God's statutes without wearying, and walk in them without fainting; and let the day on which some good has not been done to ourselves or others—some glory won for God, some progress made in the divine life—be a day mourned over, wept for, and this written down against it in the calendar of our life, 'I have lost a day.' Our hands are now sowing seed for that great harvest. We shall meet again all we are doing and have done.”

Its FUEL:

“One of the most powerful means to accomplish the duty of the text is to cultivate the love of Christ. They who would live like Jesus must look to Jesus. Happy were it for us if we got some such sight of Christ, and this glory of that sun of righteousness were so impressed upon the eye of faith that we could never forget him, and, ever seeing him, ever loved him. Experience has proved that of all instruments, the mightiest for conversion is the love of Jesus. [And] as the love of Christ to us is the mightiest power to awaken faith, so in the love of our hearts to Christ will be found the mightiest power to secure obedience, and insure our walking in God's statutes, and keeping his judgments, and doing them.”

“I do not say that you will find it easy to walk in God's statutes, to keep Christ's commandments, and do them. When the path of duty is strewn with flints and thorns, to walk over them with bleeding feet is, and must be painful. There is no use of concealing it, of denying it. No. But all the more need there is that you inflame your love by looking to Christ. Love weaves chains that are tougher than iron, and yet softer than silk. She unites the strength of a giant to the gentleness of a little child; and, with a power of change all her own, under her benign and omnipotent influence, duties that were once intolerable drudgeries become a pure delight. Love changes bondage into liberty, and, delighting in that law which was once to us what his chain is to the dog, what his task is to the slave, and against which our corrupt passions once foamed and fretted like angry seas on their iron shores, she takes up the harp of David, and sings its praises, 'Oh, how I love thy law, O Lord; it is my meditation all the day.'”

X. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE BELIEVER

“You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.” —Ezekiel 36:28-30

The blessedness of believers IN THE TEXT:

“In fact, we have more to do with this prophecy than the Jews had. Under those blessings

which God poured into their cup—those temporal mercies which filled their mouths with meat, and their hearts with gladness—lie the better mercies of Messiah's kingdom.”

The blessedness of believers IN LIFE:

“Is it not as easy for yonder great sea to carry the bulkiest ship that ever rode her waves, as the seaweed or foam she flings upon the shore? Is it not as easy for that glorious sun to bathe a mountain, as to bathe a mole-hill in gold? Is it not as easy for this mighty earth to carry on its back an Alp as a grain of sand—to nourish a cedar of Lebanon, as the hyssop on the wall? Just so, believer, it is as easy for God to supply thy greatest as thy smallest wants. Now, here lies a believer's comfort, and here shines a sinner's hope. So vanish all distinctions between great and little wants in the eye of God; so disappears all difference between great and little sins, or great and little sinners, to the blood of Christ. Whatever be your circumstances, trials, cares, and griefs, this promise fits them — 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be.' A chain of iron and a thread of flax are all one to God. The blood of thy Savior cleanseth from all sin; and nothing being impossible, nay not even difficult to Omnipotence, be assured, that in your battle, and watch, and work, you shall find this promise true — 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'”

The blessedness of believers IN DEATH:

“God's people are like his ancient Israel. They have enemies who will harass them in life, and follow them to the very shores of time; but whoever, or whatever these may be—sin, sorrow, poverty, temptations, trials, fears, doubts, Satan himself—oh, a death-bed shall be the death of them all. In leaving life we leave these behind. Death is their destruction, not ours. We 'shall see them again no more forever.' Satan may not only pursue God's people to their very death-bed, but harass them upon it. He knows that his time is short. It is his last chance. Another day or hour, and they are out of his grasp; and so—summoning all the powers of hell—he drives down like the Egyptians into the sea—into the very depths of death—and aggravates by his horrible suggestions the struggles of a dying hour. The saint has, in that time of darkness, two enemies upon him—death, and him that has the power of death, that is the devil. Be it so; God shall take off their chariot-wheels; they shall not reach the other shore, nor set foot in heaven; there, there enters nothing to hurt or to defile.”

“This is what the redeemed escape *from*, but oh—what they escape *to*—the joys they enter on when they go to be with Christ, who can tell? Never, at least, till then, shall we know either where heaven is, or what heaven is. The best description of it is to say that it is indescribable. Paul, on his return, attempted no other. It is enough for me to know that heaven, the home of the blessed—the palace of the Great King—has joys which eye never saw, ear never heard, and which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.”

The blessedness of believers AT THE RESURRECTION:

“The dust of saints is dear to Christ. He comes to claim it. All that death and Satan hold they must relinquish; all that Christ has purchased he shall possess. The soul wants her partner; and although the exile may return no more, nor see his native land, the redeemed shall return to claim their bodies from the earth—aye, and claim the very earth they lie in. 'The saints shall inherit the earth.' A grand destiny awaits this world of sins and sorrows. This earth, purified by judgment fires, shall be the home of the blessed. The curse of briars and thorns shall pass away with sin. From the convulsions of expiring—or rather the birth pangs of parturient nature—a new-born world shall come, a home worthy of immortals, a palace befitting its King. The blood that on Calvary dyed earth's soil shall bless it, and this theater of Satan's triumph, and of a Savior's shame, shall be the seat of Jesus' kingdom, and the witness of his glory.”

XI. THE SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

"I, the Lord, have spoken and will do it." —Ezekiel 36:36

The NATURE of the promise:

"So long as there was pulse and breath in Lazarus, his sisters often left their brother's couch, and went to door and window to see if there was yet any sign of Jesus. Days ago a messenger had been dispatched with the tidings, 'He whom thou lovest is sick;' and they felt like the mother of Sisera, when, wearying for her son's return, she looked for him in the glare of day, and listened for him in the gloom of night, crying, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Death at length quenches hope. The funeral is over; and, when four days have elapsed, a lingering Lord is seen descending the heights of Olivet in his approach to Bethany. One enters the house of mourning and whispers, 'The Lord is come.' Would his presence have preserved the life of Lazarus? Had he been present, Lazarus had not died, but he who could have saved Lazarus from the tomb, when it has closed upon his friend, calls him out of it. The power that would have proved the sick man's remedy, stands at the mouth of that yawning sepulcher the dead man's resurrection. Let my text lay hold of the redemption of Christ, and it has all, and more than all the power it ever had—the cross, the crown, peace, pardon, grace in life, hope in death, heaven throughout all eternity—these are all wrapped up in a deep, solemn, heartfelt, divine conviction of this truth: 'I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.'"

The COMFORTS of the promise:

*The believer may thus commit all his EARTHLY CARES to God:

"Child of God! Put in a fearless hand into this lottery of Scripture, and draw. With faith in God's superintending providence and his unfailing word. Child of God! Shield thy heart from cares that are the torture of others, and from temptations that are often their ruin. 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed.'"

*The believer may thus be sustained amid the TRIALS OF LIFE:

"Though it may be easy for an onlooker to preach patience, it is not easy for a sufferer to practice it. Still, God casts his people into trial for the very same reason that the refiner commits his silver to the furnace. He tries them to purify them. He does not afflict willingly. Be assured that he has no more pleasure in their sufferings than a kind surgeon in his patient's groans, or a parent in his children's tears. Winter, no doubt, is not the pleasant season that summer brings, with her songs and flowers, and long, bright, sunny days. Bitter medicines, no doubt, are not savory meat. Yet he who believes that all things shall work together for good, will be ready to thank God for physic as well as for food; and for the winter frost that kills the weeds, and breaks up the soil, as for the dewy nights and sunny days that ripen the fields of corn.

*The believer may thus cheerfully hope, and patiently wait, for HEAVEN:

"The holier the child of God becomes, the more he pants after the perfect image and blissful presence of Jesus. Paul said, 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' His was a higher and more heroic wish than to get to heaven. He wished to make a heaven of earth; and, persuaded that nothing could separate him from the love of God, or, finally, from heaven, believing that all which God had said of him he would do for him, and knowing that, though the vision tarried, it would come, he possessed his soul in patience and peace—waiting for the Lord. 'The sleep of a laboring man is sweet.' And, oh—heaven shall be sweetest to him who has wrought through the longest day, and toiled the hardest at his work."

The CERTAINTY of the promise:

*NATURE assures us that what God has said, He will do:

“If fire burned the one day, and water the next; if wood became at one time as heavy as iron, and iron at another as buoyant as wood; if here the rivers hasted to the embraces of the sea, and there, as in fear, retreated from them, what a scene of confusion this world would become! In truth, its whole business rests on faith—on our belief, that God will carry into unfailing effect every law which his finger has written in the books of nature and of providence. This is the pillow on which a sleeping world rests its weary head; this is the pivot on which its business turns. Now let us remember, that there are not two Gods; a consistent Divinity who presides over nature, and a capricious Divinity who presides in the kingdom of grace. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.'”

*PROVIDENCE assures us that what God has said, He will do:

“I will venture to say, that the dread of a second deluge aggravated no man's sufferings, nor changed a sinner's curses into a penitent's prayers. Why not? Ah! Men say the sea has never left her bounds. Apart altogether from the records of revelation, geology tells us that she has, and that round the rock where the eagle now has her nest, monsters of the deep have swam, and that the highest peaks of earth's highest mountains were once the islands of an ancient sea. Yes! But then, it is said, there is the bow in the cloud, and the promise in the Bible, 'Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood. . . ' That indeed is a security against a second flood. Now, shall God keep his word to this doomed, sinful, polluted world—shall he keep the covenant of the bow, and not keep the covenant of the cross? The providences of four thousand years assure us that he who is true to his covenant with Noah, shall not be less true to the blood-sealed covenant made with his beloved Son. True to his threatenings, Almighty God will be true to all his promises; and to both we can apply the words of Balaam — 'Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor; God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?'”

XII. THE NATURE, NECESSITY, AND POWER OF PRAYER

“This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them; I will increase their men like a flock.”
—Ezekiel 36:37

The NATURE of prayer:

“Whether we have true faith, may be a question which is not easily settled; but to pray is a clear and commanded duty. The 'help, Oh, help, Lord,' never yet rose from an anxious heart, but it was heard, and accepted in heaven. And if Satan bids me hold my peace—as the disciples bade the blind man—I bid him hold his own. I refuse to be silent; I but cry the louder, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' In God's hands, when he in smiting, let me be 'dumb, opening not the mouth.' In my Father's arms I may lie and do nothing but weep—weep upon his loving bosom; but in the arms of this mortal and malignant enemy, who has seized me, and is carrying me off to prison and pit—a lamb bleating in the lion's jaws — 'I will cry unto the Lord, and he will answer me, and send help from above, and deliver me.'”

The NECESSITY of prayer:

“Observe how in my text God hangs all the blessings of salvation upon prayer. He says—as it were—I have had pity upon sinners; I have provided pardon for the guilty, justification through the righteousness, and life through the death of my Son; I have promised to take

away the heart of stone and replace it with one of flesh; I have promised my Spirit to sanctify, sufficient grace, a certain heaven—all these blood-bought, gracious, happy, holy blessings shall be yours, freely yours; yet not yours, unless they are sought in prayer. 'I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.'"

"But if an immutable God has foresettled everything by an eternal and irreversible decree, what purpose can prayer serve? Who shall change the unchangeable? Thus men have argued, saying, 'What profit shall we have if we should pray unto him?' It were not difficult to expose the fallacy of this reasoning. The objection may be entirely answered. We might show that the decrees of God embrace the means as well as the end; and since prayer is a means of grace, being a means to an end, it must be embraced within these very decrees, and cannot be excluded by them. I content myself, however, with simply saying, that this objection is not honestly, at least not intelligently, entertained by any man. For, if the objection is good against prayer, it is good against many things besides. If it stops action in the direction of prayer—if it arrests the wheels of prayer—it ought to stop the wheels of our daily business. If a good objection against prayer, it is an equally good objection to ploughing, sowing, taking meat or medicine, and a thousand other things. Might not an unwilling or indolent husbandman, in spring, as well ask, what is the use of sowing? Has not God ordained everything? If I am to have a harvest—if he has decreed a harvest for my farm—then, although no plowshare turn up a furrow, nor sower walks its fields, they shall wave in autumn with golden corn."

The POWER of prayer:

"Prayer changes impotence into omnipotence; for, commanding the resources of Divinity, there is nothing it cannot do, and there is nothing it need want. Child of God! Pray on. God's people are more dear to him than our children can be to us. He regards them with more complacency than all the shining orbs of that starry firmament. They were bought at a price higher than would purchase the dead matter of ten thousand worlds. He cares more for his humblest, weakest child, than for all the crowned heads and great ones of earth, and takes a deeper interest in the daily fortunes of a pious cottage than in the fall and rise of kingdoms."

*"Faith, bold faith, the promise sees
And trusts to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, it shall be done."*

The Gospel in Ezekiel: A Simple Chart

Doctrine	Verse	OT Shadow	NT Reality
The MESSENGER of the gospel	<i>36:16</i>	Ezekiel, the “Son of man”	All believers in one sense; ministers of the gospel in another sense
The DEPRAVITY of man	<i>36:17</i>	Israel defiled the land by their ways and deeds	Mankind defiles themselves and creation by their ways and deeds
The JUST WRATH of God	<i>36:18-19</i>	The condemned are banished from the land of Israel	The condemned are banished from paradise
The MOTIVE of God in salvation	<i>36:21-23</i>	God would deliver Israel from exile for His own name's sake	God delivers His people from sins' punishment, power, and pollution for His own name's sake
The NATURE of salvation	<i>36:24</i>	God would assuredly bring Israel back to their land	God will assuredly bring His people back to himself
The doctrine of JUSTIFICATION	<i>36:25</i>	God would cleanse Israel from their filthiness	God washes His people clean from their sin in justification
The doctrine of REGENERATION	<i>36:26</i>	God would take the heart of stone away and give Israel a new heart	When God saves a man He gives him a completely new heart with new desires in regeneration
The doctrine of CONVERSION	<i>36:26-27</i>	God would not only take away the heart of stone but put in His people a new spirit	When God saves a man He turns his entire mind, will, and temper unto himself—giving him a “new spirit”
The doctrine of SANCTIFICATION	<i>36:27</i>	God would cause His people to walk in His statutes and observe His ordinances	In sanctification, God is transforming His people more and more after His image in true holiness
The doctrine of the saints' BLESSEDNESS	<i>36:28-30</i>	God would do away with famine and multiply grain and the produce of the field	In Christ, God has and will for eternity pour out in fullest measure His blessings upon His people
The doctrine of the saints' SECURITY	<i>36:36</i>	The Lord had spoken—and He would do it	What the Lord has promised to do for us in Christ is as good as done
The nature, necessity, and power of PRAYER	<i>36:37</i>	God would do this when His people call upon Him	God saves and sends revival to the church when His people pray