

Sermon XIV.

Isaiah lix. 20.—“And the Redeemer shall come unto Zion, and unto them that turn,” &c.

Doctrines, as things, have their seasons and times. Every thing is beautiful in its season. So there is no word of truth, but it hath a season and time in which it is beautiful. And indeed that is a great part of wisdom, to bring forth everything in its season, to discern when and where, and to whom it is pertinent and edifying, to speak such and such truths. But there is one doctrine that is never out of season, and therefore it may be preached in season and out of season, as the apostle commandeth. Indeed to many hearts it is always out of season, and especially in times of trouble and anguish, when it should be most seasonable, when the opportunity may commend the beauty of it, but in itself, and to as many as have ever found the power of it on their hearts, it is always the most seasonable and pertinent doctrine,—I mean the very subject-matter of this text, the news of a Redeemer to captive sinners. It is in itself such glad tidings, and shines with so much beauty and splendour to troubled sinners, that it casteth abroad a lustre and beauty on the feet of the messengers that carry it, Isa. xl. It is a cordial in affliction, whether outward or inward, and it is withal the only true comfort of prosperity. It allayeth the bitterness of things that cross us, and filleth up the emptiness of things that pretend to please us, it giveth sweetness to the one, and true sweetness to the other. Reason then—that should always be welcome to us, which we stand always in need of, that it should always be new and fresh in our affection, which is always recent and new in its operation and efficacy toward us. Other news how great or good soever, suppose they were able to fill the hearts of all in a nation with joy, yet they grow stale, they lose their virtue within few days. What footsteps or remainder is of all the triumphs and trophies of nations, of all

their solemnities for their victorious success at home and abroad? These great news, which once were the subject of the discourse of and delight of many thousands,—who report them now with delight? So those things that may cause joy and triumph to some at this time, as they cannot choose but make more hearts sad than glad; so they will quickly lose even that efficacy they have, and become tasteless as the white of an egg, to them that are most ravished with them. But, my beloved, here is glad tidings of a Redeemer come to Zion to save sinners, which have no occasion of sadness in them to any, but to those who are not so happy as to consider them, or believe them, and they are this day, after many hundred, I may say thousand, years since they were first published, as green and recent, as refreshing to wearied souls, as ever they were. Yea, such is the nature of them, and such an everlasting spring of consolation is in them, that the oftener they be told, and the more they be considered, the sweeter they are. They grow green in old age, and bring forth fruit, and are fat and flourishing; and indeed it is the never-dying virtue and everlasting sap of this word of life, that maketh the righteous so, Psal. xcii. 14. This word of a Redeemer at the first publishing, and for a long time, was but like waters issuing out from under the threshold, and then they came to the ankles, when it was published to a whole nation; but still the longer it swells the higher above knees, and loins, till it be a great inexhausted river, and thus it runs at this day through the world, and hath a healing virtue and a quickening virtue, Ezek. xlvi., and a sanctifying virtue, ver. 9-12. Now this is our errand to you, to invite you to come to these waters. If ye thirst, come to be quenched; if ye thirst not, ye have so much the more need to come, because your thirst after things that will not profit you, will destroy you, and your unsensibleness of your need of this is your greatest misery.

That the words may be more lively unto us, we may call to mind, the greatest and deepest design that hath been carried on in the world, by the Maker and Ruler of the world, is the marriage

of Christ his Son with the Church. This was primarily intended, when he made the world, as a palace to celebrate it in; this was especially aimed at, when he joined Adam and Eve, in the beginning of time, together in paradise, that the second Adam should be more solemnly joined to the church, at the end of time, in the paradise of heaven; and this the apostle draws out as the sampler and arch-copy of all marriages and conjunctions in the creatures, Eph. v. Now this being the great design of God, of which all other things done in time are but the footsteps and low representations, the great question is, how this shall be brought about, because of the great distance and huge disproportion of the parties, He “being the brightness of the Father's glory,” and we being wholly eclipsed and darkened since our fall;—He higher than the heaven of heavens, and we fallen as low as hell into a dungeon of darkness and misery, led away by sin and Satan, lying in that abominable posture represented in Ezek. xvi.; not only unsuitable to engage his love, but fit to procure even the loathing of all that pass by.

Now it being thus, the words do furnish us with the noble resolution of the Son, about the taking away of the distance, and the royal offer of the Father, to make the match hold the better, both flowing from infinite love, in the most free and absolute manner that can be imagined. The Son's resolution, which is withal the Father's promise, is to come into the world first to redeem his spouse, and so to marry her; “and the Redeemer shall come unto Zion,” &c. The Father's offer, that he might not be wanting to help it forward, is to dispone,²⁹⁷ by an irrevocable covenant, having the force of an absolute donation, his word and Spirit to Christ and his seed, to the church, even to the end of the world, (ver. 21). “As for me, this is my covenant.” The Son hath done his part, and is to express his infinite love, infinite condescendency, and stooping below his majesty. Now, as for

²⁹⁷ [Dispone is a Scots law expression. It signifies to convey a right or property to another.—*Ed.*]

me, I will show my good-will to it in my infinite bounty and riches of grace to the church; he hath given himself for her,—I will give my Spirit; and thus it cannot but hold.

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We shall speak a word then of these three: first, what estate and condition Christ findeth his church in, out of which she must be taken to be his spouse; then, what way and course is laid down by the council of heaven, to fill up the infinite distance between Christ and sinners; and, to close all, we shall show you the suitableness of these promises, and the wonderful fitness of this doctrine to the church, at this time Isaiah preached it, and at all times.

The first is supposed in the words. Redemption supposeth captivity or slavery; redemption of persons importeth captivity and slavery of these persons, and redemption of other things that belong to persons, importeth sale or alienation of our right to them. Of both, personal redemption is the greatest and most difficult; yet both we have need of, for our estate and fortune, so to speak, is lost, “for all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” Rom. iii. 23. That inheritance of eternal life, we have mortgaged it, and given away our right to it. The favour of God and the blessedness of communion with him, was Adam's birthright, and by a free donation was made his proper inheritance and possession, to be transmitted to his posterity. But O! for how small a thing did he give it away,—for a little taste of an apple he sold his estate; and both he and we may lament over it, as the king that was constrained to render himself and all his army for want of water. When he tasted it, “For how small a thing,” saith he, “have I lost my kingdom!” Then our persons are in a state of bondage, in captivity and slavery; captives under the wrath of God, and slaves or servants to sin. There needed no greater difference and deformity between Christ and us, than this,—our servitude and bondage to sin, which truly is the basest and most abominable vassalage in the world. The abasement of the highest prince, to the vilest servitude under the basest creatures in his

dominion, is but a shadow of that loathsome and ugly posture of our souls. This servitude doth in a manner unman us, and transform us into beasts. Certainly it is that which, in the holy eyes of God, is more loathsome than any thing beside. He seeth not that deformity in poverty, nakedness, sickness, slavery. Let a man be as miserable as Job on his dunghill, it is not so much that, as the unseen and undiscerned posture and habit of their souls, that he abominateth. Now what a match is this, for the highest and holiest prince, the Son of the greatest King, and heir of all things! But if you add to this slavery, that captivity under the curse and wrath of God,—that all men are shut up, and enclosed in the prison of God's faithful and irrevocable sentence of condemnation, and given over by the righteous judgment of God, to be kept by Satan in everlasting chains of darkness,—he keepeth men now, by the invisible cords of their own sins, but these chains of darkness are reserved for both him and men,—now indeed, this superaddeth a great difficulty to the business. The other may be a difficulty to his mind and affection, because there is nothing to procure love, but all that may enforce hatred and loathing. But suppose his infinite love could come over this stay, could leap over this mountain by the freedom of it, yet there is a greater impediment in the way, that may seem difficult to his power, and it is the justice and power of God, enclosing sinners and shutting them up for eternal wrath, till a due satisfaction be had from or for them. You see then, how infinite the distance is betwixt him and us, and how great the difficulty is to bring about this intended union. Angels were sent with flaming swords to encompass the tree of life and keep it from man, but man is environed by the curse of the Almighty God. The justice, the faithfulness, and the power of God do guard or set a watch about him, that there is no access to him to save him, but by undergoing the greatest danger, and undertaking the greatest party that ever was dealt withal, and the strictest and severest too.

This being the case then, the distance being so vast, and

the difficulty so great, the distance being twofold, between his nature and ours, and between our quality and his: an infinite distance between his divine nature and our flesh, and besides an extreme contrariety between the holiness of his nature, and the sinfulness of ours,—[there is here] such a repugnancy, as there is no reconciliation of them. You know what Paul speaketh of the marriage of Christians with idolaters: how much more will it hold here? What communion can be between light and darkness, between God and Belial? Is it possible these can be reduced to amity, and brought to so near an union? Yet for all this, it is possible; but love and wisdom must find out the way. Infinite love and infinite wisdom consulting together, what distance can they not swallow up? What difficulty can they not overcome?

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And here you have it, the distance undertaken to be removed, both by the Father and the Son,—(for all this while we can do nothing to help it forward; while the blessed plot is going on, we are posting the faster to our own destruction). And this is the way condescended upon; *first*, To fill up that wide gap between his divine spiritual nature, and our mortal fleshly nature, it is agreed upon, that the Son shall come in our flesh, and be made partaker of flesh and blood with the children; and this is meant by this promise, “the Redeemer shall come to Sion;” which is plainly expressed by his own mouth, John xvi. 28, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world.” There being such a distance between his majesty and our baseness, love maketh him stoop down and humble himself to the very state of a servant, Phil. ii. 7, 8. And thus the humiliation of Christ filleth up the first distance; for “love and majesty cannot long dwell together,” *nec in una sede morantur majestas et amor;*²⁹⁸ but love will

²⁹⁸ See:

Non bene conveniunt, nec in una sede morantur,
Majestus et amor.

Ovid. Met. lib. ii. v. 846.—Ed.]

draw majesty down below itself, to meet with the object of it. This was the great journey Christ took to meet with us, and it is downward below himself; but his love hath chosen it, to be like us, though he should be unlike himself. How divinely doth the divine apostle speak of it, "And the Word was made flesh, and he dwelt among us," John i. 14. And therefore the children of Adam may in verity say of him, what the holy Trinity, in a holy irony spake of man, "Lo, he is become as one of us." It was a singular and eminent privilege conferred upon man in his first creation, that the Trinity in a manner consulted about him, "Let us make man after our image;" but now when man hath lost that image, to have such a result of the council of the Trinity about it, "let one of us be made man, to make up the distance between man and us;"—O! what soul can rightly conceive it without ravishment and wonder, without an ecstasy of admiration and affection!—that the Lord should become a servant!—the Heir of all things be stripped naked of all!—the brightness of the Father's glory, be thus eclipsed and darkened!—and in a word, that which comprehendeth all wonders in the creation,—who made all things,—be himself made of a woman! and God become a man, and all this out of his infinite love, to give a demonstration of love to the world; so high a person abased, to exalt so base and low as we are! There is a mystery in this, a great mystery, a mystery of wisdom, to swallow up the understanding with wonder; and a mystery of love, to ravish the hearts of men with affection,—depths of both, in the emptiness of the Son of God. The prophet doubted what was commanded, to seek a sign, whether in heaven above, or in the depth beneath; but what he would not ask, God gave in his great mercy, "Behold a virgin shall conceive a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel;" a sign indeed from heaven, and the height of heaven, because he is God; and a sign from the depth beneath too, because he is man; "God with us," and so composed to unite heaven and earth together; "God with us," that he might at length bring us to be with God. He

became *Immanuel*, that he might make us *Immelanu*.²⁹⁹ If that was given as tidings of great joy, and as the highest and deepest sign of love and favour, at that time to uphold the fainting church; O! how much more may it now comfort us, when it is not a virgin shall conceive, but a virgin hath conceived! May not the joy be increased, that the Redeemer is not to come, but come already, and hath made up that wide separation which was between us and him, by his low condescendency to his union with our nature! This is one step of advancement towards that happy marriage, that the whole creation seems to groan and travail for, Rom. viii. 22. But yet there is a great difficulty in the way. We are in a state of captivity; we are prisoners of justice, have sold ourselves and our happiness; and now our natural inheritance lies in the lake of fire and brimstone,—heirs of wrath, concluded under the curse of God; and indeed, this was insuperable to all flesh; neither men nor angels could ransom us from this. The redemption of the soul of man is so precious, and the redemption of the inheritance of man, that is, heaven, is so precious too, that none in heaven or earth can be found, that can pay the price of them, so that it would have ceased for ever. And here the great design of Christ's union with sinners would have been marred and miscarried, if himself had not undertaken to overcome this too; and indeed, as there could none be found to open the seals of the book of God's decrees concerning his church,—none worthy in heaven or earth but the Lamb, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, he prevailed to open it, and loose the seals thereof, Rev. v. 3-5. So there could none be found in heaven or earth, neither under the earth, worthy to undertake or accomplish this work, or able to open the seals of the book of God's curses, or to blot out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, or to open the prison of death in which man was shut up; none, I say, hath been found worthy or

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²⁹⁹ [The name Immanuel [redacted] signifies, *God with us*. Immelanu [redacted] signifies, *we with God*.—Ed.]

prevailed, but the Lamb of God and Lion of the tribe of Judah; and therefore the four and twenty elders that sit round about the throne, and the four beasts, with the innumerable company of angels, and spirits of just men made perfect, fell down before the Lamb, every one of them with harps, and they sung a new song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing; for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." And every creature says Amen to this, and consents to this, to do him homage; to him who alone was worthy, and as willing to do it as worthy for it. I think the 16th verse of this chapter gives us a sensible representation of this. The preceding discourse from the beginning, holding out the sinful and deplorable condition of that people, and in them, as a type of the desperate wickedness of all mankind, and withal their desperate misery, for Paul, (Rom. iii.) maketh the application for us; and from this, concludeth all under sin, and so all under wrath, all guilty, that every mouth may be stopped; men waiting for light, and behold obscurity; for brightness, but walking in darkness; groping for the wall, like the blind, stumbling at noon-day as in the night, and in desolate places as dead men; all roaring like beasts, and mourning like doves, whenever the apprehension of the terror of God entereth. Now it is subjoined, verse 16, "And he saw that there was no man," &c.; as if he had waited and looked through all the world, if any would appear, either to speak or do for man, if any would offer themselves, and interpose themselves for his salvation. "Therefore his own arm brought salvation, and his righteousness, it sustained him." Therefore the Son of God steps in and offers himself, as if God had first essayed all others, and when heaven is full of wonder and silence, he breaks out in this, "Lo, I come to do thy will," Psal. xl. Since I have gotten a body to be like sinners, I will also come in their place, and I will give my life a ransom for them; and therefore it is subjoined, "the Redeemer shall come to Zion;" he shall come clothed with vengeance and

indignation as a garment, against the enemies of his church, sin and Satan, in zeal and burning love to his designed spouse. He shall strengthen himself, and stir up his might and fury against all that detain her captive.

Now, indeed, he is the only fittest person for this business in heaven or earth; for he hath both right to do it, and he only hath might and power to accomplish it. He hath right to the redemption of sinners, because he is our kinsman, nearest of blood to us.

Now, you know the right of redemption belonged to the kinsman, Lev. xxv. 25. And therefore when the nearest kinsman could not redeem Naomi and Ruth's parcel of land, Boaz did it, as being next. And suitable to this, our Lord Jesus, when others as near could not, and were not able, he hath done it, and taken men and angels to witness, that he hath first redeemed us, that he might marry us, as Eph. v.; that he hath purchased us to be his wife. And indeed the very word imports this; *Goel*,³⁰⁰ a redeemer and kinsman, passing under one word: so Job, "I know that my Redeemer," or my kinsman, "liveth:" and because our kinsman, therefore most interested in our redemption; for, for this end he became partaker of flesh and blood with the children, that he might destroy our greatest enemy, Satan, and redeem us, Heb. ii. 14. And besides, he hath right to redemption, as the Church's husband, because he must mediate between her and all others; none can reach her, except he please, or prosecute a plea against her, as in the case of the wife's making a vow, if her husband consented not, it was void, (Numb. xxx.) but if he heard of it and held his peace, it was confirmed. Now the Lord Jesus hath known this deplorable estate in which we are captives, and he hath testified his utter dislike of our binding

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³⁰⁰ [The *Goel* (██████), or nearest kinsman, was, by the Mosaic law, entitled not only to redeem a forfeited inheritance, but to avenge the blood of any of the family, by slaying the murderer, if he found him out of a city of refuge. He was therefore called the redeemer, or "avenger of blood," Josh. xx. 3.—*Ed.*]

over ourselves to death, and resigning ourselves to Satan; and therefore this bondage in which we are detained, is not confirmed and ratified, but he hath right remaining to redeem us from the hand of all our enemies. But then, he alone hath might and power to do it, for God hath laid help on him, and made him able and mighty to save us to the uttermost. It was not gold or silver, or corruptible things. Suppose the whole earth were turned into gold or precious stones; he must give person for person, and one person equivalent to all—his own life, his own blood for us; and the value of this was infinitely raised by the stamp of his divinity put upon it. The king for the servant,—one that knew no sin for sinners,—yea, God for man. This superadds infinite worth, and makes it an over-ransom, and over purchase, a ransom to buy our persons from hell, a purchase to redeem us to our inheritance, heaven, that we had lost, and these two styles it gets, λυτρον, αντιλυτρον.³⁰¹

Now, you see the great difficulty is overcome and taken out of the way: Christ, being made a curse, hath purchased a redemption from the curse of the law, Gal. iii. 13. But yet, there is another point of vast distance, I may say contrariety and enmity, between us and him. He is holy and undefiled, all fair, and no spot in him; we are wholly defiled and depraved by sin, our souls are become the habitation of devils, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird; in a word, he hath not only our enemies to overcome, but our own hearts to conquer, and our enmity to take away. This makes the widest separation from him. Now,

³⁰¹ [The word λυτρον denotes the price of redemption, or that which is given to purchase the freedom of those who are in a state of captivity. "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give his life a ransom (λυτρον) for many" (Matt. xx. 28, Mark x. 45). αντιλυτρον is but once used in the New Testament. Its gratification is a counter-price, or the ransom that is paid when the life or person of one is given for that of another. "For there is but one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom (αντιλυτρον) for all," 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. Vide Leigh's Critica Sacra.—*Ed.*]

he filled up much of the distance, with his taking our flesh, and he removed the great difficulty, by dying in our flesh his humiliation to be a man, brought him nearer us, and his further humiliation to be a dying, crucified, and buried man, brought him yet a step nearer us. But nearer he cannot come, for lower he cannot be, except he were a sinner, which would mar the whole design, and take away all the comfort of his likeness to us. Therefore, since he hath come so low down to us, it is suitable we be raised up one step to meet him, and so the exaltation of sinners shall make up all the distance, and bring the two parties to that long since designed, and long desired meeting. Now, for this end and purpose, the Son undertakes the redemption of his church from sin and ungodliness as well as wrath, and therefore you have that which is expressed as the character of the redeemed in this verse. It is expounded as the great point or part of the redemption itself by the apostle, Rom. xi. "The Redeemer shall come to Sion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." And so his end was not only to be a partaker of our nature, but to make us partakers of the divine nature, and therefore the Father, out of his love to this business, promised to send his Spirit to dwell in our hearts, to make the word sound in our mouths and ears, and the Spirit to work in our hearts, and this exaltation of sinners to the participation of the Holy Spirit, together with Christ's humiliation to partake of our flesh, makes up the full distance, and bringeth Christ and his church to that holy patient impatience, and longing for the day when it shall be solemnized in heaven. The Spirit within us says, Come, and the bride says, Come. Even so come, Lord Jesus. And he waits for nothing, but the completing and adorning of all the rest, that there may be one jubilee for all and for ever. Now I wish we could understand the absolute and free tenor of God's covenant. There is much controversy speculative about the condition of the covenant, about the promises, whether absolute or conditional; and there is too much practical debate in perplexed consciences

about this, how to find something in themselves to fit and fashion them for the redemption. But truly, if we would not disjoin and dismember the truth of God, but take it all entirely as one great design of love and mercy revealed to sinners, and so conjoin the promises of the covenant into one bundle, we would certainly find that it hath the voice of Jacob, though it seem to have the hand of Esau; we find an absolute, most free and unconditioned sense, when there is a conditional strain and shadow of words in some places. The truth is, the turning of souls from ungodliness is not properly a condition exacted from us, as a promise to be performed in us, and the chiefest part of Christ's redemption; and though some abuse the grace of God, and turn it into wantonness and liberty, yet certainly, this doctrine, that makes the greatest part of the glad news of the gospel to be redemption from sin, and the pouring out of the Spirit, is the greatest persuasive to a godly conversation, and the most deadly enemy to all ungodliness. [437]

I thought to have spoken more of that third thing I proponed,³⁰² but take it in a word. This was always proponed to the church as the strongest cordial, it was given here as the greatest consolation in all their long captivity, that this Redeemer was afterwards to come, whose virtue was then living, and present to the quickening and comforting of souls. It was thought enough to uphold in a most desperate strait, "To us a child is born," Isa. ix. 6. I wish we could take it so. Certainly it was the character of a believer before Christ's coming, that he was one that was looking and waiting for the salvation of Israel, by this Redeemer. But now we are surrounded with consolation before and behind,—Christ already come, so that we may in joy say, Lo! this is our God, we have waited for him! others waited and longed, and we see him,—and Christ shortly to come again without sin, to our salvation. And what could be able to take our joy from us, if we had one eye always back to his first coming, and another always forward to

³⁰² [That is, proposed.—*Ed.*]

his coming again?