

burden of earth off your back, and let your shoes be on your feet, your eye on the prize; pursue it over the belly of all hardships you may meet with, and you will readily find God will be with you.

*Lastly*, Pray, pray, lift up a cry for the remnant that is left; let us meet continually at the throne of grace, ministers and people, to trust with him in his ordinances, and to wrestle for his presence.

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CHRIST THE FATHER'S GIFT TO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.\*

SERMON XIII.

ISAIAH lv. 4,

*Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

In the first verse of the chapter, there is a large offer of grace, and a cordial invitation to all to improve the blessings of salvation. In the second and third verses, the Lord expostulates with sinners for their slighting this offer, and pursuing after other things. Then the invitation itself is renewed, and backed with weighty motives. In all this the Lord has a special respect to the Gentiles, who at that time were strangers to the covenant of promise. In the text, there is a notable ground of encouragement for sinners to come to Christ; the very scope of it is to encourage them to come to him; it is as if God had said, Why are you afraid to come? behold I have given him for that very end, to be a witness, a leader, and a commander to the people. Therefore you may conclude, that he must have a people to believe in him as a witness, follow him as a leader, and obey him as a commander. Did ever any prince give any captain's commission, but when he designed also he should have some under him as soldiers?

In the text, we have a declaration of what God the Father hath done for poor sinners: and because it is an unequalled deed, it is ushered in with a note of attention and admiration, "Behold I have given." He has made a gift to sinners, a gift such as may supply all their wants.

1. Consider the giver; "I," that is, the Father, the contriver and source of the sinner's salvation. None else could give such a great gift, none else had power to make this gift. In regard of the giver, then, it ought to be received with all due respect and gratitude.

\* The time when this discourse was delivered is not mentioned.

2. Consider the gift, "him;" that is Christ, of whom David was a type; John iii. 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." This is a gift suitable to the greatness of the giver. He gives like a king, yea, like the King of kings: for his gift is unspeakably and infinitely great.

3. Mark the conveyance of this noble gift: "I have given him;" I have freely bestowed him. This was according to the covenant of grace; he was not given against his will. No; his Father's will and his are one, he gave himself also. The Father freely designed him for the work, and he cheerfully accepted, saying, "Lo! I come."

4. Consider the end of this gift. For what purpose did the Father give Christ? Why, it was to supply the needs of the people, both the Jews and the Gentiles. But here the Gentiles seem to be especially aimed at, ver. 5, "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not; and nations that know not thee shall run unto thee." What sort of people these were, may be learned in part from the ends for which Christ is given. He is given,

(1.) For a witness, to testify the truth and to reveal the mind and will of God to the people: John xviii. 37, "To this end," said Jesus, "was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth; every one that is of the truth he heareth my voice." Hence it follows, that they are an ignorant people that know not God, nor the mysteries of salvation; the very people, that have lost their eyes in Adam; an unbelieving people, who will not believe God, unless he proves what he says by his witness.

(2.) For a leader, to go before them as a prince and a captain, as the word signifies, and so they are a people that have difficulties to go through, and know not their way, and so stand in need of a leader. He is given,

(3.) For a commander, to give them laws and rules for their obedience. This implies that they are an unruly people, who must have one to keep them in order.

There is a "behold" prefixed to the text. This serves to stir up attention and admiration. Let us consider and wonder, how graciously and suitably the Lord has provided for us.—In this verse there is this

DOCTRINE, That the Father's giving of Christ to be a witness, leader, and commander to sinners, is a matter worthy of deepest consideration, and greatest admiration.

In discoursing on this subject, it is intended, by divine aid,

I. To shew you some special steps of God's giving this noble gift, Christ.

II. To inquire for what this gift is so remarkable.

III. What we may behold in the Father's giving this gift. And,

IV. To conclude with a practical improvement.

We are then,

I To shew you some special steps of God's giving this noble gift, Christ.

1. God made this gift before time, even from all eternity, in respect of designation; the Lord designed him to be a witness, leader, and commander to the people; from all eternity did God design to bring many sons to glory; and therefore at that period also did he design their captain for them. What is done in time is but the execution of eternal decrees; eternal life was promised us in Christ Jesus before the world began, Tit. i. 2.

2. God gave him in the morning of time, in the first promise: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent." When Adam fell, and involved all his posterity in a lost condition, when he had carried all of them out of the way of life, so that none of them could ever know it again without a witness, nor walk in it without a guide, then God promised this noble gift, to make up what Adam had lost, and to restore to us what he had taken away.

3. In the fulness of time, when he actually exhibited this gift; when the word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," Gal. iv. 4.

Then was seen that great gift foretold by Moses and the prophets, shadowed forth by the law, and looked for with earnest expectation by the people of God. A time it was when he thus came, wherein the world lay in deep spiritual darkness; the knowledge of the true God was almost totally abolished among the Gentiles; they knew not God, and the true religion was dreadfully corrupted among the Jews. The few that remained were wearied with the burdensome ceremonies, that could not make the comers thereunto perfect, and therefore looked for the mercy promised unto the fathers.

4. God gave this gift in the last time, when the gospel was freely preached to all nations. Then it was, and ever since, that Christ set up his standard in the world, to receive all, without distinction that would fight under his banner. Thus God gave him in respect of the free offer: "He is the gift of God," John iv. 10.

5. He gives him, in particular, to every elect soul in the time of love, the day of espousals. This is that blessed spot of the believer's time, wherein they match with the Son of God, believe his word, and

give themselves up to his conduct. They thus receive the unspeakable gift of God; and this is a crowning mercy indeed! Whosoever thus by faith receives this precious gift, shall receive him over again in the marriage-day, that is, when time is over and gone. Then it shall be said, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."—Let us,

## II. Inquire for what this gift is so remarkable?

1. It is remarkable, for the hand from whence it came. It was the Father that gave Christ; even he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, Rom. viii. 32. If a gift be valuable for the sake of the giver, then Christ is the most valuable gift, as given by the Father; and therefore he that slights Christ, slights the Father also. The town-clerk of Ephesus supposed that none could but know, that the Ephesians would be zealous for the image of Diana, because it was supposed to have fallen down from Jupiter, Acts xix. 35; ten thousand times better reason have we most highly to esteem our Lord Jesus, because we have the most infallible assurance, that he came down from God, the Father of mercies, "My Father (said Jesus), giveth you the true bread from heaven," John vi. 32.

2. It is remarkable for the persons to whom it is given. Who are they? they are men, and not angels, sinners and not saints: "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us," Rom. v. 8, "Yea, in due time he died for the ungodly." Men that give gifts, usually give them to their friends, but God gave even his unspeakable gift to his enemies; men gave to the rich, but God gave to the poor; he gave this gift to them that had mis-spent the gifts bestowed upon them at their creation. O let us set a mark here, and say, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!" 1 John iii. 1.

3. It is remarkable for the seasonableness of it. God not only gave his Son, but he gave him in proper season; as it was with Abraham, for whom God provided a ram to be offered in the stead of his only son Isaac, who was already bound on the altar; so, when the sinner's neck was on the block, when divine justice had a sure hold of him, and was about to strike the fatal blow, then did God provide, and give Jesus to be a sacrifice in our stead. O what a surprise, as well as a comfort, was the promise of him to poor Adam! and O how welcome to us should be this faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that God sent even his own Son, "to seek and to save that which was lost."

4. It is remarkable for the suitability of it. Unsuitable gifts

are not much esteemed. What though a man would give a purse full of gold to one starving for want of bread, or present plenty of food to a person just dying of an incurable disease? Such unsuitable gifts could be of no use to these persons; but Christ is every way suitable to the sinner's case: "Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him; because he ever liveth to make intercession for us." For such an High-priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." The balsam of his blood exactly answers our wounds in breadth and length; it cleanses from all sin, and purges the conscience from dead works. It was contrived by infinite wisdom for this purpose, and every sinner whose eyes are opened at once sees his suitableness; for Christ is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God," 1 Cor. i. 24.

5. This gift is remarkable, for the necessity of it: Acts iv. 12, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." What would the world have been without Christ but a dungeon of darkness, a pit of horror, a prison of misery and despair? Had we only heard God thundering on Mount Sinai, and not God groaning on Calvary, then we had made the rocks rent, and the hills resound with our desperate outcries. No man, no angel, was able to help; nothing but the blood of God could expiate our guilt.

6. It is remarkable for the greatness of it. It is a gift without a parallel in heaven or in earth: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son," John iii. 16. A greater gift than this Heaven could not give, and earth could not receive. The salvation is great, but the Saviour, the person who wrought out this salvation, must be greater. Many rich and blessed gifts God gives his people, but they are all little when compared with this great gift, for along with it he freely gives us all things. When God resolved to display and communicate his goodness, his wisdom, power and bounty, he made a world out of nothing; but when he resolved to manifest his love, and discover all his glory, he gives us to view it in the face and person of Jesus. The Sabbath was appointed for celebrating the praises of God for the work of creation; but in addition to this, eternity is destined to celebrate the praises of the riches of his grace and glory in Christ Jesus.

7. This gift is remarkable, for the freedom of it.—Christ is a gift every way free. There is a cluster of wonders in the freedom of it.—These we shall in part take notice. This gift is given,

(1.) To the undeserving. We deserve no good at the hand of the Lord, much less the greatest good; we cannot challenge a drop of

water by merit, much less Christ and his grace; so that God cannot wrong us, whatever he deny us. It is given,

(2.) To the ill-deserving; to them who deserved death and damnation; who were justly lying under the curse of the first covenant, and whose demerit would have sunk them to hell. Yea, this gift is given,

(3.) To them that were not seeking it: "I am sought (says God) of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that were not called by my name." Christ can say of all his people, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." The Father presses the gift of his Son upon poor sinners, even when they are feeding on husks, and not seeking after him, saying, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness," Isa. lv. 2. It is given,

(4.) To them that were not expecting it, or looking for any such gift at his hand. How was Zaccheus surprised when Jesus said unto him, "This day is salvation come to thine house," Luke xix. 9.

(5.) Yea, it is still offered to them who have often refused it, who have been frequently bidden to the marriage-supper, and have as often refused to come: "Ye will not come to me, (says Jesus), that ye might have life;" but yet still does he say, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

8. This gift is remarkable for the unchangeableness of it. All the spiritual gifts and callings of God are without repentance; but above all it is so with Jesus, his great and unspeakable gift. Where he once comes, he never afterwards goes away. There is a strict bond of union betwixt Christ and the soul, which death itself cannot dissolve; yea, "there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." If the soul cannot keep fast hold of Christ, Christ will keep fast hold of it: "I know my sheep (says Jesus), and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," John x. 27, 28. If the hand of faith be weak, he can strengthen it; and the Spirit of God does not faint or grow weary. The term of the union between Christ and believers is during life eternal.—Let us,

III. Inquire what we may behold in the Father's giving this gift. Much, much indeed, may we here behold, that merits our attention, admiration, gratitude and love. But at present, time only permits me simply to mention a particular or two.

1. In this gift we may see our own needs. If our necessity had

not been very great and urgent indeed, God would not have given his own Son, to be a witness, leader, and commander to us; had not our misery been great, and also beyond the power of men and angels to deliver from it, God would not have provided and given such a ransom for us. This at once shews our misery to have been so great, that none but Jesus could deliver us from going down to the pit. The divine excellence and infinite value of the remedy, clearly demonstrate the absolute necessity on our part of such a cure.

2. In this gift we may see infinite love. What but love, love eternal, and boundless grace, could have induced God the Father to have given his own well-beloved Son, even to die in the room of such creatures as we are? Instead of merit, we had the very greatest demerit; and God was under no obligations to give us such a gift; his own love, then, was the source. In the gift itself, we have the greatest display of love ever made to any of the creatures of God; the greatness of it the heart cannot conceive, nor the tongue express; the greatness of it will through eternity excite the admiration, gratitude, and love of angels and men.

3. In this gift, we have to contemplate a glorious design of doing good to sinners. All the gifts of God are intended for our good; but as this is the greatest of them all, yea, infinitely greater than them all taken together, so the good evidently intended by it is also exceeding great; yea, it bears a proportion to the infinite value of the gift itself. When we consider the divine dignity of the person sent, and his near relation to the Father, when we consider the greatness of the work his Father gave him to do, and the tremendously dreadful sufferings which he appointed him to endure, we may at once conclude, that the good thereby intended for sinners was so great, as to be worthy of the wisdom and goodness of the person who sent him, and worthy also of the Son of God to accomplish. This was nothing else than eternal life: Jesus, "the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings, that he might bring many sons to glory."

IV. Let us now conclude with a practical improvement.

My friends, when God makes offer of this gift to you, slight it not, but receive it gratefully; accept of Christ as he is offered in the gospel. When Christ on the cross saw his mother standing by the disciple whom he loved, he said unto her, "Woman, behold thy Son!" then to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!" and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. So does God address you, saying to each of us, Behold my Son Christ, and take him home into your hearts.—For motives to this consider,

1. That Christ is a leading gift. Wherever he comes, he never comes alone, he brings a train of blessings along with him, even all the blessings of the everlasting covenant; for in him all the promises are yea and amen. Receive him, and ye shall have a complete and everlasting righteousness with him, reconciliation and peace with God, pardon of sin, sonship to God, an inheritance among them that are sanctified, and, finally, a right to all things. If ye receive him all things are yours: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours: and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

2. He is a soul-satisfying gift, in the enjoyment of which your souls may rest. Are you not seeking satisfaction, and pursuing after happiness? but "why do you seek the living among the dead?" Why do you suck the dry breasts of the world, and the impure fountains of your own lusts, that cannot satisfy? Isa. lv. 2. Nothing but an infinite good can satisfy the desires of the human soul, and here it is. Here in Christ, like Habakkuk, you may find a source of joy and strength, when all other comforts fail. As nothing but the mother's breast can satisfy the hungry infant, so nothing but Christ can satisfy your souls aright: "Whosoever drinketh of the water (saith Jesus) that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life," John iv. 14.

3. He gave himself to the death, that he might be a gift suitable to your necessities. He is that bread that the Father gave from heaven; bread that was ground between the mill-stones, and baken in the oven of God's wrath, that he might be bread to you.

4. Do ye not need, positively need him? Can you be happy without a pardon, peace with God, a righteousness, and an everlasting inheritance? Now, there is no possible way of obtaining these, but by him. O! my fellow-sinners, how can ye live or die without him? Sure your own necessities have a loud cry to you not to slight him; your souls, pining away in sin, cry, O slight not a Saviour! your souls, truly sick, cry, O slight not the physician!

5. Consider, he is in your offer; you may have him if you will. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth, say Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." You see there is nothing to hinder your receiving him: for the Father is willing to give his Son to you, and the Son is willing to give himself, the Spirit is willing: "All things are ready, come ye to the marriage." Nay, it is not merely a simple offer, but a command: "This is the command of

God, that ye believe on his Son." Therefore under the pain of God's eternal displeasure, accept of him: "He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned.

6. Consider, he will not always be in your offer. When once the Master hath risen up, and shut the doors, ye may knock in vain, there will be no more entrance. Thus ye may be taken from the offer, or it from you; now, then, is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation.

*Lastly*, Consider if ye receive him not, ye are lost for ever; and then it will be more tolerable for them that never heard of him, than for you:

"If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of God?" For we know him that hath said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, and I will repay, saith the Lord," Heb. x. 28—30.

My fellow-sinners, will ye now take this gift from heaven? I am sure there would not need to be so much work to make you receive a gift that is not worthy once to be named with this: if ye will not take it, what have you to say for yourselves? Perhaps the reasons why some will not receive this gift may be easily found out; as,

1. Some will not, because they need it not; like Esau, in another case, they may be ready to say, "I have enough, my brother, keep that thou hast unto thyself," Gen. xxxiii. 9. Alas! many are full, are rich, and reign as kings without Christ; but, O! would to God they were rich, and did reign. Such persons only reign like Saul, when God departed from him. Sure am I, that if there be a soul under heaven needs Christ, it is such a person. They who, like the Laodiceans, are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, blind, and naked, O how much need had they to listen to the counsel of Jesus, and buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they may be rich; for what have ye without Christ, but has God's curse in it? all your gifts are cursed to you, Mal. ii. 2, "I will even," says God, "send a curse upon you, and will curse your blessings, yea, I have cursed them already," because ye do not lay it to heart.

2. Others will not, because they have not room for it; many have no room for Christ; their hearts and affections are otherwise taken up. But, O! what takes up that room? what guests do you lodge in your hearts, that the Son of God cannot have access? If ye have not room, will ye make room? Tell him ye are content to take him,

and invite him to make room for himself, and he will do it. He is able to cast out your idols, and to pull down the strong-holds of sin and Satan that are in your hearts.

3. Some will not, because they like not the onerous cause of the gift. There are many that cannot digest what is required of them who belong to Christ: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." They could take the crown, but they cannot away with the cross, or the hard service. Such are to be pitied, for they are led aside by mistakes; if Christ was in your hearts, his service would be your choice, and you would glory in his cross.

4. Many will not, because they have no will to come under the obligation of a gift. Thus it was with the Jews; going about to establish their own righteousness, they submitted not themselves to the righteousness of God. This pride of heart lies often veiled under the shew of humility, when all the while the soul refuses to come to Christ, because of unwillingness. Well, you must either be obliged to Christ for your salvation, or perish; for do what you will, or suffer what you will, if Christ be not yours, you perish.

*Lastly,* Not a few will not, because they think, though it may do good to others, yet it can do none to them. Who knows but this may be the temptation of some! this is the poisonous breath of monstrous unbelief, that at once flies in the face of God's truth, making him a liar, 1 John v. 10; and in the face of his wisdom, as if he had provided an unsuitable remedy. Sinner, who ever perished in the hands of Jesus? and O what desperate cases has he cured! But do you object there was never the like of yours? *ANSW.* Then you will glorify Christ the more, if you will venture yourself in his hand. Many wonderful precedents have you as proofs of his ability. Venture yourselves then in his hand, "for he is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." Amen.