

tent man he had healed, "behold thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." And for this cause observe your Physician's rules in all things.—Walk circumspectly, take notice of every step you make, as one who has had a broken limb healed; Isa. xxxviii. 15, "I shall go softly," said Hezekiah, "all my years, in the bitterness of my soul." And beware of walking in the dark, of going forward there where you cannot discern your way by the light of the Lord's word. Study to increase in love to Christ, zeal for his glory, and hatred of sin. Always keep correspondence with your Physician. Be often at the throne of grace by prayer, and keep up communion with him in the exercise of faith. "They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Amen.

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JESUS PROCLAIMS LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES.

SERMON LII.

ISAIAH lxi. 1,

*To proclaim liberty to the captives.*

HITHERTO we have had Christ's commission as it respects those who have some good in them, the meek and the broken-hearted. Here is his commission with respect to those who have no good in them, but are utter strangers to him, living in their natural state. He is anointed *to proclaim liberty to the captives*. In which words consider,

1. Man's natural state. It is a state of captivity: they are captives to Satan: 2 Tim. ii. 26, "And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captives by him at his will." He is the tyrant whose captives they are, who has carried them away out of the light of God's favour, and holds them fast in his territories, being the god of this world. Consider,

2. Christ's work with respect to them. It is *to proclaim liberty* to them, Luke iv. 18, "To preach deliverance to the captives." These are indeed the same. Luke's word for liberty or deliverance, is properly dismissing or letting away, that is, giving liberty. The words for preaching and proclaiming signify properly to cry, and are used either of preaching or proclaiming. And what is preach-

ing but proclaiming in the name of the king of heaven? and so this relates to Christ's kingly office.—From this part of the subject we take the following DOCTRINES:—

DOCTRINE I. That sinners in their natural unregenerate state are Satan's captives.

DOCTRINE II. That Jesus Christ, with the express consent of his Father, has issued out his royal proclamation of liberty to Satan's captives.

We begin with

DOCTRINE I. That sinners in their natural unregenerate state are Satan's captives.

For illustrating this doctrine, we shall consider,

I. How sinners in their natural state have become Satan's captives.

II. What is their condition as Satan's captives.

III. The properties of this captivity, and then,

IV. Add the improvement of the subject.

We are then,

I. To shew how sinners in their natural state have become Satan's captives. They have become his captives,

1. As taken in war; 2 Peter ii. 19, "Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." Satan having proclaimed war against Heaven, maliciously set on our first parents in paradise, and on all mankind in them. He set on them as the confederates of heaven, and carried his point, gained the victory. And in this respect he is still pursuing the victory, and driving the unrenewed world before him as prisoners of war, called his lawful captives, Isa. xli. 24. They have become his captives, because

2. They are born his captives, as being born of those whom he overcame and carried captive. So they are expressly called the children of hell, Matth xxiii. 15. There were many of the captives in Babylon who had never seen Canaan, having been born in that country. These were captives no less than their parents, and that by their birth. So is it with Adam's posterity naturally; they were born under the power of Satan, Acts xxvi. 18. When a slave, under the law, married in his master's house, though at the end of seven years he got his own freedom, yet the children were his master's, as being born in his house, and could not be free without a particular liberty for them, Exod. xxi. 4. Thus even the children of godly parents are by nature Satan's captives; children of Abraham, children of the devil. To the Jews our Saviour said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do," John viii. 44. We were,

II. To enquire what is their condition as Satan's captives. Upon this we observe,

1. That every natural man is transported from his primitive soil into Satan's territories, his kingdom of darkness. Hence believers are said "to be turned from the power of Satan unto God." Acts xxvi. 18. And again, Col. i. 13, "God has delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Sinners are not now where God at first set them down; they are transported into another kingdom; like the prodigal, they have left their father's house, and gone into a far country, where they have spent their substance, Luke xv. 13. They are far from God, his covenant, and his Son. Thou art in Satan's kingdom, O unconverted soul! a black and dismal kingdom, where sin, darkness, and death reign, where there is no gleam of saving light or life; and if thou wert awakened out of thy dream, thou wilt see matters so situated; a kingdom with which God will have war for ever; and thou art an unhappy subject of that kingdom.

2. They are plundered and robbed of all that is valuable, as captives used to be; Rev. iii. 17, "They are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The light of the mind, the righteousness of the will, the holiness of the affections, all are lost, all has become a spoil and a prey to the hellish conqueror. Now thou art a poor captive, who hast nothing truly good left thee, nothing which the bands of hell have not made thee render up.

3. They are stripped, as has also been an ancient custom of dealing with captives. Thus, as the prophet Isaiah, ch. xx. 3, 4, walked three years naked, for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia; so did the king of Assyria carry away these nations captive, naked and bare-foot. What a melancholy sight is it, to see brave men, who were glittering in shining apparel and arms at the commencement of an engagement, when fallen into the hands of their enemies, stript and driven away naked before the conquerors. But yet more melancholy to see precious souls stript by Satan of their original righteousness, and driven away before him, without any covering but rags, filthy rags, Rev. iii. 17. This, O sinner, is the shameful and dangerous case which thou art in as Satan's captive.

4. They are no more masters of themselves, but under the power of the conqueror; 2 Tim. ii. 26, "They are taken captive by him at his will." Their liberty is gone, and they are slaves to the worst of masters. Wonder not that many a poor sinner is at Satan's beck, over the belly of reason and conscience, to serve the devil, to their own visible ruin. Alas! they are captives, not at their

liberty, but must go as he commands them; Rom. i. 23. "There is a law in their members, which bringeth them into captivity to the law of sin and death."

5. If they get anything that is valuable, they cannot get it kept, it is torn from them by the conqueror. As the Babylonians wasted and insulted the Israelites, when they carried them away captives, so does Satan waste and insult his captives, Psalm cxxxvii. 3. Sometimes the natural man gets a conviction of sin or duty darted in on him, and this produces relentings for sin, and resolutions to amendment of life; but they do not continue. Alas! how can they, while they are Satan's captives, who will not suffer them to think of entertaining them, more than Pharaoh would endure the Israelites to think of leaving his service. Nay, he rests not till they have thrown them away.

6. They are so secured as that they cannot get away, they are kept by the strong man under the power of darkness, Col. i. 13. There is a gulf fixed between them and all spiritual good, so that they cannot pass. Satan has his guards on them, whom they cannot escape to come back to the Lord. He has them fettered with divers lusts, which they cannot shake off. And, in a word, nothing less than a power stronger than all the powers of hell can make way for the deliverance of a captive.

*Lastly*, If they but offer to make escape, they are more narrowly watched, stronger guards set on them, and more work put in their hands; as Pharaoh did with the Israelites, so the devil does with his captives, Rom. vii. 9, 10, 11. Hence many never go so far wrong, as on the back of communions, convictions, or times of more than ordinary seriousness, the powers of hell being joined together to stop the fugitive. We now proceed,

III. To speak of the properties of this captivity. Here we observe that it is,

1. A spiritual captivity, a captivity of the soul. The soul is the most precious part of the man; and therefore the captivity of it must be the most deplorable. All the captivity of men; if they were captives to the Turks or the most barbarous nations extends but to the body. He whose body is in the power of another, his soul and thoughts are as free as those of any. But Satan lays his bands upon the inner man, and, go the body as it will, he holds fast the man, in so far as he holds fast the soul. And,

2. It is universal. It extends to all the powers and faculties of the soul, the inner man. The natural man's mind is Satan's captive; 1 Cor. ii. 14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The Lord formed the mind of man in him, and endowed it with knowledge, to be the guide of the whole man in the way of happiness; to be the eye of the soul, to distinguish betwixt sin and duty; and the pilot to direct his course through the several rocks and quicksands that lay betwixt him and the shore of the upper Canaan. But in the engagement betwixt Satan and mankind, being wounded by the deceit of the tempter, Gen. iii 5, it fell into the hands of the enemy, who robbed it of its light, and shut up sinners in darkness. Hence they are said to be in darkness, Eph. v. 8. They cannot see the way to escape, and withal, there is struck up a false light in the mind, which, like wild-fire, leads the soul into pits and snares, causing it to put sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet, good for evil, and evil for good. They thus "glory in their shame, and mind earthly things," Phil. iii. 19. Again, the will is his captive. They have a stony heart, Ezek. xxxvi. 16. The Lord having endowed this faculty with righteousness, and straightness with his own will, for, Eccl. vii. 29, "God made man upright," gave the will dominion over the man, that nothing, good or evil, could be done by him without it. But behold it fell likewise into the enemy's hands, who hath given it such a set to the wrong side, that no created power can again straighten it; hence, 2 Thes. iii. 5, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." He only can do it. Satan holds it so fast, that it cannot move without the circle of evil he has drawn about it, nor can it will anything truly good in a right manner: Phil. ii. 13, "It is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Satan hath loaded it with such heavy chains, that it cannot come to Christ at his call, no more than a mountain of brass can come to a man at his call. "No man," saith Jesus, "can come unto me, except the Father who sent me draw him." Farther, the affections also are Satan's captives; Gen. vi. 5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The affections being made perfectly holy, were subjected to the guidance of the mind, and the command of the will, and were set in the soul to execute its holy contrivances and will. But they also were taken in this war with hell; loosed from this bond of subjection to the understanding and will in these things, but nailed to Satan's door-posts to serve him and his work in the soul for ever; so that they have no heart for the price put into their hand to get wisdom, and can have no heart to it. But the natural man's joys and delights are arrested within the compass

of carnal things, together with his desires, sorrows, and all his other affections.

3. It is a hard and sore captivity. The Egyptians and Babylonians never treated their captives at the rate Satan does his. They are held busy, and even busy working their own ruin, kicking against the pricks, digging for the grave as for hid treasures. It is their constant work to feed their lusts, to starve their souls; and the design of their master is, that the one may ruin the other. It is their daily employment, to weave snares for their own feet, twist cords to bind themselves over to destruction, and dig pits into which they may fall, and never rise again. In so far as sin is their work, they wrong their own souls, Prov. viii. 36, and shew themselves in love with death. This captivity is,

4. A perpetual captivity. A few years captivity among men, how grievous is it! And men will do what they can to be ransomed. But this conqueror will never quit his captives, unless they be taken from him by Almighty power. Death at farthest looses other captives; "For in the grave," says Job iii. 18, 19, "the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor; and the servant is free from his master." But those who die Satan's captives are so far from being free, that they are ensured to him for ever and ever.

*Lastly*, It is a voluntary captivity, and thus the more hopeless; 1 Tim. ii. 26, "They are taken captive by Satan at his will." They need not to be driven. They do not only go, but they run at his call: Rom. iii. 15, "Their feet are swift to shed blood." Though they were taken in war, and born captives, yet now he is their master, by their own consent and choice, while they choose to serve the devil, and cannot be brought to give themselves to the Lord. It is a bewitching captivity. The sinner once captive to Satan, never cares for his liberty, unless grace changes his heart. He glories in the badges of his slavery; loves his work heartily, and is well pleased with his condition. The gracious proclamation of liberty by Christ sounds in his ears; but he says, I love my master, I will not go out free.—We are now,

IV. To make some practical improvement,

*First*, In a use of conviction. Know then, and be convinced, O unconverted sinner, that thou art the devil's captive. Are there not many who have never troubled their heads about their state, who never have had anything like a work of grace or conversion upon their spirits? many in whom their hopeful beginnings have been all marred? I would say to every such one, thou hast been hearing of the case of the devil's captives, and thou art the man, thou art

the woman, as fast in his power as ever prisoners of war were in the hands of their conquerors. You will not believe it, and this is your sin, and also your misery, Rev. iii. 17. You will be ready to sign yourselves, and defy the devil; though you have never been, by regenerating grace, delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Col. i. 13. But this is Satan's way with his captives, to put out their eyes; 2 Cor. iv. 4. "He blinds the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them;" that they cannot know where they are, or who it is that has got hold of them. Do you think that it is only witches and wizards who are the devils captives? No, no, Satan may have a full possession of thy soul, though his name with thee be not Legion. Even praying people, and great pretenders to religion, to righteousness, and sobriety, and those who have turned to a strict course of life, much more to making a profession of religion, may still be children of hell, as our Saviour called the Scribes and Pharisees, Matth. xxiii. 15. And all unregenerate ones are children of wrath, and the devil's captives. He is "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;" and they are "the children of wrath," Eph. ii. 2, 3. Will you apply what was spoken before for your conviction?—Try yourselves.

1. Art thou not, O unconverted sinner! carried off from God's gracious presence, into the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness? What knowest thou of the light of God's countenance shining on thy soul? Certainly thou wast once darkness, Eph. v. 8. Has there any spiritual saving light broke up in your soul yet? Has the long night of thy natural state had a morning yet? Or are you not in the state in which you was born? If you be not in darkness, what means your works of darkness, and your not discerning the transcendent excellence of Christ?

2. Are you not robbed and stripped of your spiritual ornaments? Where is the light of the mind, the righteousness of the will, the holiness of the affections, which man had before he fell into the enemy's hands, and which are restored in some measure to the ransomed of the Lord?

3. Are you free to righteousness? are you not under the power of the conqueror? How is it then that you have no power to resist a temptation, that Satan can so easily carry you the way you know to be wrong, over the belly of reason and conscience? Nay are not your lusts upon you like fetters, that you cannot move away from carnal things God-ward?

4. Are you not quickly spoiled of any beginnings of good which you sometimes meet with? You hear the word, but do not the fowls

pick it away from you? Have not all your convictions and resolutions gone off by degrees like a morning cloud? How quickly has all the noise within your breast been hushed, and you as much again in love with your lusts as ever!

Admit the conviction, then, for they who never saw themselves Satan's captives, are never yet made Christ's free men, John viii. 32, 33, 44, 45. What think you, is the work of grace carried on in the soul as a morning dream? Are the devil's captives brought away, and never know that they were his captives? What way can a soul embrace the proclaimed liberty to the captives, who never saw itself in this condition?—Consider, that this will be the first step to your liberty. The gospel is sent "to open your eyes, and to turn you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that you may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ," Acts xxvi. 18. Christ's Spirit begins his work with conviction of sin and misery. He makes the captives to see where they are, whose they are, and what is their case. This rouses them out of their lethargy, makes them prize this liberty; it makes them glad to come away with their deliverer; "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help."—This subject may be improved,

*Secondly*, In an use of exhortation.

O captive exiles! hasten to be loosed, that you may not die in the pit, and that your bread may not fail, Isa. li. 14. Stir up yourselves to regain your liberty, and remain no longer at ease in your captive condition. Consider,

1. That a short time's continuance in this state will put you beyond a possibility of liberty: Eccl. ix. 10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Thy life is uncertain, and if death carry thee off in this condition, thou wilt be carried to the lower prison, and then farewell liberty for ever and ever; Luke xiii. 24, 25, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not, whence ye are." The servant under the law, though he refused his liberty at the end of six years, yet received it in the year of jubilee. But whoso in this life refuse to come away from Satan's service, shall never see a time after for it. And when thou art closed up in the net, it must be without remedy; it will be no comfort to think that you did not imagine it would have come to this. Consider,

2. That now is the time of liberty; 2 Cor. vi. 2, "Behold now is the accepted time! behold, now is the day of salvation!" Christ has paid a ransom for Satan's captives and the liberty is proclaimed in the gospel. Strike in with the season of grace, and come away with the deliverer upon the gracious proclamation. Hear what Christ is saying to you, Song ii. 10, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

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SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

SERMON LIII.

ISAIAH lxi. 1,

*To proclaim liberty to the captives.*

HAVING, in the preceding discourse, spoke to the first of the doctrines which we took from this part of the subject, we go on to

DOCTRINE II. That Jesus Christ, with the express consent of his Father, has issued out his royal proclamation of liberty to Satan's captives. "He hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives."

In illustrating this doctrine, we shall,

I. Shew what this proclamation is.

II. Explain what liberty is proclaimed in the gospel to Satan's captives.

III. Mention some of the circumstances attending this proclamation. And then,

IV. Subjoin the improvement of the subject.

We are,

I. To shew what this proclamation is. This royal proclamation issued out by Jesus Christ, is the gospel, the glad tidings of salvation. The gospel is the proclamation of the King of heaven to poor sinners, in which he proclaims liberty to all the captives of Satan, to whom it comes. The law lays the heavy yoke of the curse upon sinners, the gospel brings the offer of liberty. Here we observe,

1. That it is a jubilee-proclamation. You have the law of jubilee, which was every fiftieth year, when seven times seven were over; Lev. xxv. 10, "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man into his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family." It was

proclaimed by sound of trumpet, on the day of atonement, ver. 9, then all the poor slaves got their liberty, whether their masters were willing to part with them or not; and all those who had been obliged to mortgage or sell their lands returned to the possession of them again. And so it was a proclamation which made many a heart glad. Now, the gospel is such a proclamation, and the time of it is the year of jubilee. Jesus came, Isa. lxi. 2, "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn;" compare 2 Cor. vi. 2, "Behold, now is the accepted time! behold, now is the day of salvation!" O! good news, sinners, there was a day of atonement on the cross, and now the trumpet of the gospel soundeth, and there is a proclamation, bearing that Satan's captives may now have their liberty, though their master be not willing to part with them; that the mortgaged inheritance of heaven and God's favour, though forfeited, may be possessed; poor criminals and bankrupts may return to them again.

2. It is a conqueror's proclamation to captives. The king of Babylon took the Jews captive, and held them seventy years in captivity; but God raised up Cyrus; Isa. xlv. 1—4, and he overturned the Babylonian empire; the destruction of that kingdom was the deliverance of the Jews, for he proclaimed liberty to them to return to their own land. This also was a type of the gospel-proclamation. Satan warred against mankind, he carried them all captive into his own kingdom; and there was none to deliver out of his hand. But King Jesus had engaged him, routed all his forces, overturned his kingdom, and taken the kingdom to himself; Col. ii. 15, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." 1 John iii. 8, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." And now being settled on his throne, his royal proclamation is issued out, that Satan's captives may again return into the kingdom of God.

We shall now,

II. Explain what liberty is proclaimed in the gospel to Satan's captives.

This is the great subject of the proclamation; and that you may see the riches of this proclamation, *know* that Christ by the gospel proclaims to every poor sinner to whom it comes,

1. Liberty from the power and slavery of Satan; Acts xxvi. 18, "He turns them from the power of Satan unto God." Every one who is willing to quit their old master the devil, may come away without his leave. You are welcome to Jesus the conqueror, and the conquered tyrant shall not have power to keep you. Now,

“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 of the water of life freely;” Rev. xxii. 17. He is a strong one, but there is a stronger one than he, who will break his yoke from off your necks, make his iron fetters to give way, like ropes which are burnt with fire. And though, as long as you are here, he will be molesting you, yet he shall never, never gain his former power over you, and you shall at length be completely freed from the least molestation by him; “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly;” Rom. xvi. 20. He proclaims,

2. Liberty from the law as a covenant of works; Rom. vi. 14, “You are not under the law, but under grace.” Satan’s captives are under the law as a covenant of works, and it lays a heavy yoke upon them, namely, perfect obedience, under the pain of the curse: Gal. iii. 10, “For as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse, for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” This curse they carried away with them when they went into captivity, and it abides on them always, till they be loosed from it. Now, Christ proclaims liberty from this curse, offers to bring sinners from under the dominion of the law, to be under grace, where there is no more curse; Gal. iii. 13, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.” Here they are provided with a righteousness imputed to them, and not set to seek it by their own works! where, in case of sinning, the utmost penalty is fatherly chastisement; Psalm lxxxix. 30—33. Thus he offers to take off the law’s yoke, to set you without the reach of its curse, and to lay on his own yoke, which is easy; Matth. xi. 29. Jesus proclaims,

3. Liberty from the dominion and bondage of sin; Rom. vi. 14, “Sin shall not have dominion over you.” Satan’s captives are all the drudges of sin. It does not only dwell in them, as it does in the best, but it reigns over them, fills their hearts and hands continually with its work, so that they can do nothing else but sin; Psalm xiv. 3, “There is none that doeth good, no not one.” It lays its commands on them, which are a law which they cannot dispute, but must obey; it has its several lusts in the heart, which are chains to them as its captives, the handles by which it holds them, and drags them after it. Now, Christ proclaims liberty from this, and his Spirit effects it; Rom. viii. 2, “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, makes them free from the law of sin and death.” He will break sin’s dominion, loose the chains of unmortified lusts, and set the prisoners free; John viii. 32, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” And though sin may dwell for a

season, as an unclean, unwelcome guest, he will at length extirpate it wholly. He proclaims,

4. Liberty from the ruining influence of this present evil world; Gal. i. 4, "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." This world has a ruining influence on Satan's captives. The things of this world work their destruction, the smiles of it are killing; Prov. i. 32, "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them;" their blessings are turned to curses; the frowns of it are ensnaring and destructive. The god of this world mixes every cup with poison. The men of this world are ruining one another; and therefore it is said, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation;" Acts ii. 40. There is a plague in Satan's family, and each member serves to infect another, to convey sin and death to his fellow. But Jesus proclaims liberty from this pest-house; you may be drawn out of it, Jesus will pluck you as a brand out of the fire; why stay in it, while he proclaims liberty to you from it? Jesus proclaims,

5. Liberty from the fear, the terror of death and hell; Heb. ii. 15, "He delivers them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Satan's captives may for a time be secure, fearing nothing; but as soon as their conscience awakens, they will be filled with horror, as perceiving the approach of death and hell towards them; they can have no comfortable view of another life. Christ proclaims liberty from this; if you will come to him, conscience shall be pacified with the sprinkling of his blood, ye shall be set beyond the possibility of perishing; he will be to you an almighty Saviour. He proclaims,

6. Liberty from the sting of death and the evil of afflictions. Though Christ, in his gracious proclamation, does not promise that such as obey his will in it shall never be afflicted; yet he promises that afflictions shall be so far from doing them hurt, that they shall do them good; Rom. viii. 28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose;" that though they die, death shall be to them unstinged; John viii. 51, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." So that they may meet it with that triumphant song; 1 Cor. xv. 55, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?" It shall not be to them what it is to Satan's captives: the serpent's sting, with which it kills the serpent's seed, shall be taken away ere it comes near them. Jesus proclaims,

7. Liberty from the power of the grave; 1 Cor. xv. 55, quoted above. Ver. 57, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory,

through Jesus Christ our Lord." Satan's captives are laid up in their graves as in prisons; and when they come out of them at the resurrection, death and the power of the grave will be still hauging about them; so that they shall but change one grave for a worse, namely, for the lake of fire. But Christ's ransomed ones, who come away on his proclamation of liberty, though they go to the grave, yet the power of it over them shall be broken, death shall have no more power over them for ever. He proclaims,

8. Liberty from condemnation; Rom. viii. 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." All Satan's captives are condemned malefactors; John iii. 18, "He that believeth not is condemned already." And the sentence shall be solemnly pronounced against them at the great day; and so they shall be led away "into everlasting burnings, prepared for the devil and his angels;" Matth. xxv. This is terrible; but Christ proclaims liberty from it. So soon as thou embracest the offered liberty, the guilt of eternal wrath shall be done away, thou shalt be beyond the reach of condemnation; your standing on the right hand is secured, and the sentence of solemn absolution shall follow. He proclaims,

9. Liberty of free access to God, with holy boldness; Rom. v. 1, 2, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Now, the captive exiles are banished from the presence of God; they can have no access to him, nor communion with him. But our Lord, by his death, has opened the two-leaved gates of his Father's house, and gives free liberty, by open proclamation, to Satan's captives, leaving their master to come in. They have access by one Spirit to the Father.—Jesus proclaims,

*Lastly*, Liberty, that is, freedom of spirit in the service of God; 2 Cor. iii. 17, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The Spirit of Christ is called a free spirit, because he makes free. Satan's captives may yield some obedience to God, but it is burdensome, because they act therein as slaves, from a slavish fear of hell and wrath. But Christ's freemen act from a nobler principle, love; Rom. viii. 15, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby ye cry, Abba, Father:" 1 John iv. 18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love." We now proceed,

III. To mention some of the circumstances attending this proclamation. Here we observe,

1. That the law on which it is founded was the eternal agreement of the glorious Trinity for man's redemption. The eternal law of love and good-will to poor sinners, by which it was provided, that upon the Son of God's laying down his life a ransom for an elect world, they should be delivered from the captivity of sin and Satan, and be made God's freemen; which the eternal Son engaged to do. Accordingly, in the fulness of time he did it, and thereby purchased their liberty. We observe,

2. That the proclamation was drawn up, and is recorded in the Bible, by the Holy Spirit; Isa. lv. 1, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." And what is the whole Bible but a declaration of this liberty, with promises to those who accept of, and threatenings to those who refuse it. The truth and reality of this declaration is sealed by the blood of Christ; "This," said he, "is the New Testament in my blood." So that there is not the least ground to doubt its truth. We observe,

3. That this proclamation is issued out by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the consent of his Father and the Spirit. The Father has sent him to proclaim liberty to the captives. The Spirit says, Come. A whole Trinity invites Satan's captives to liberty. They have no will that the captive exile should die in the pit; Ezek. xviii. 23, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" We observe,

4. That this proclamation is directed to men, to the sons of men; Prov. viii. 4, "Unto you, O men, do I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." Not to fallen angels, they are excluded from the benefit of the purchased liberty. But the captives in the land of the living, these prisoners of hope, to them is the proclamation directed, without exception of great, yea, even the greatest of sinners; Rev. xxii. 17, "Whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely." Isa. i. 18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Such are invited, though they have often refused their liberty, and though they have gone back into their captivity. We observe,

5. That the first crier of this proclamation was the Son of God in his own person. He made this proclamation first in paradise; Gen. iii. 15, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent." Afterwards he took on him man's nature, then came and proclaimed it; Heb. ii. 3, "The Gospel at the first began to be spoken unto us by the Lord." And he sealed it with his most

precious blood, though there were but few who came away upon the proclamation made by him; "Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" is the complaint of the prophet Isaiah. We observe,

6. That, being ascended into heaven, he has appointed criers in his name the ministers of the Gospel, to publish this proclamation, and to invite sinners to accept of this liberty; 2 Cor. v. 20, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." This is our work, to proclaim it unto you, to make you sensible that liberty is purchased, and offered unto you. We are the voice of the great crier; Christ cries to you by us. We observe,

*Lastly*, That the place where the proclamation is ordered to be made is in this world; Mark xvi. 15, "Go ye," said Jesus to his disciples, "into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." As for those who are gone into the other world, the proclamation can reach them no more; the prisoners there are without hope. But while you are in this world, the proclamation is to you, and particularly when in those public assemblies where the Lord's people are gathered together to hear it; Prov. i. 20, 21, "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city she uttereth her words." It only remains,

IV. That we make some improvement of the subject. This shall be confined to an use of exhortation.

We would exhort you, O captives of Satan! to comply with the design of this proclamation of liberty; we beseech you, receive not this grace of God in vain. To be more particular, we exhort you,

1. To be convinced of your state of captivity; deceive not yourselves with thoughts of liberty, while you are really serving divers lusts. Till you see your captive state, what hope can there be of good to be obtained by the proclamation of liberty? We exhort you,

2. To be willing to come away and forsake your old master and his service. Ah! may not the time past suffice to have done the will of the flesh? 1 Pet. iv. 3. You have been long under this captivity; had the youngest of you been as long a slave to any man as you have been to Satan, you would have been weary of your situation long ere now. O! strive that your spirits may be raised towards your being free, and walk no more contentedly in your chains of divers lusts. You will say, you are not able to come away; but if you were willing, you would not be allowed to remain in your captive state. We exhort you,

3. To be affected at the heart with the news of the proclamation of liberty. Do not hear it unconcernedly, but hear as those who are nearly concerned in the matter. Take a view of the wretched state you are in, and wonder that there is yet hope. How glad were the Israelites in Egypt and Babylon of the notice they had of their liberty! Thy captivity is a thousand times worse, and thy heart should leap within thee at the voice of the deliverer. We exhort you,

*Lastly,* To accept of the proclaimed liberty, and come away with the deliverer. Give up with your old master, lay by his work, bid farewell to his kingdom, as never to remain more in it. Shake off your fetters resolutely, and embrace cordially the offered liberty of the sons of God. To prevail with you in doing this, we present you with the following motives :—

MOTIVE 1. Consider that the captivity you are in is a most miserable bondage and slavery; Egyptian, Babylonish, and Turkish slavery and captivity, all in one, are not sufficient to represent it. And this will appear, if you consider;

(1.) That the master is the devil. While thou art in thy natural state, thou art the devil's captive and bond servant, 2 Tim. ii. 26, and that by a threefold title—as taken in war, 2 Pet. ii. 19—as bought by him at a low rate, “ye sold yourselves for nought,” Isa. lii. 3, and—as born in his house, Matth. xxiii. 15. Therefore ye are called to forget that house, Psalm xlv. 10, and to come out of his family, and touch not the unclean thing, 2 Cor. vi. 17. How wretched must that bondage be where the devil is master! Sure he is a cruel and merciless master, who will take pleasure in thy miseries. Do we esteem the case of those wretches so horrible, who, by express compact, are become his? and will we yet contentedly continue in bondage to the same master? Consider,

(2.) That the work is sin, called the works of darkness, Rom. xiii. 12. None of his captives are suffered to be idle, he puts a task in their hands, which they must fulfil. One of two things they are always doing while out of Christ; either weaving the spider's web, working that which will not profit at the latter end, more than such a web will be a garment; or, hatching the cockatrice egg, doing mischief and wickedness that will recoil upon you, to your own destruction. This dung-hill work Satan employs his captives in, is most unbecoming the heaven-born soul. Consider,

(3.) That the provision and entertainment is bad and unsatisfying, Isa. lv. 2, “Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” The best of this sort, which the natural man has, is to eat dust with the serpent, to suck the breast of filthy lusts, which, though it may feast

one's corruptions, poisons the soul; or to eat husks with the swine, Luke xv. 16, to feed on the empty things of the world, which can afford no nourishment. Thus, while you ask from him bread, he gives you a stone; while you ask a fish, he gives you a scorpion. Consider,

(4.) That the wages of sin is death: Rom. vi. 23, "For the wages of sin is death." Present death, spiritual, in the separation of their souls from God, for from every natural man God is departed, whether he knows it or not. Death temporal, to come, armed with its sting, and provided with the envenomed arrows of the curse. And death eternal in hell, where they shall be ever dying, but never shall die. O! shall not the consideration of these things move you to accept of liberty, and come away from such a master, such work, such provisions, and such wages?

MOTIVE 2. The liberty proclaimed is most excellent and glorious liberty, Rom. viii. 21; the glorious liberty of the sons of God; which may create the most surpassing joy in the world. The glory and excellency of it will appear, if we consider,

(1.) The purchaser of it is Christ the King of glory. He it is by whom we have the gospel-jubilee proclaimed in the text. He is the victorious Monarch, who has overcome Satan, and gives liberty to his captives. He is our near kinsman, who has redeemed us by payment of a price, a costly price, even his own precious blood. It was the honour of the Jews that they had their liberty by Cyrus; but how much more honourable is it, to have liberty by Christ! And when such an one has purchased for us liberty, will not you accept it? Consider,

(2.) The ransom paid for it; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot." Never was such a ransom paid for the greatest captive king among men, as for us wretched sinners; even the blood of God. He compassionated the case of the poor captives, laid by the robes of his glory, put his neck under the yoke of the law, endured the wrath of God, the sting of death, and the rage of hell, and all to purchase this liberty for us. Consider,

(3.) The party to whom it was paid, to God, even his own Father; Eph. v. 2, "He gave himself an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour." Satan is but the jailor and executioner, into whose hands men fell, being condemned by the Judge, to whom alone the ransom was due. Hence, in respect of Satan, his captives are said to be redeemed without money, Isa. lii. 3. They are to be

set at liberty by main force, being violently wrested out of his hand, Isa. xlix. 25.—Consider,

(4.) The glorious privileges attending this liberty. It is not a naked freedom, which yet would be valuable, but pregnant with many precious privileges. I have told you already, that it is a liberty from the power of Satan, from the law as a covenant, &c. But besides these, many positive blessings and privileges attend it; such as, the freed captives are made free men of the New Jerusalem, they are made citizens of heaven on earth, and are burgesses there; Eph. ii. 19, “They are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” They are incorporated with the society of saints and angels, of whom Christ is the head. They who had their lot before in the kingdom of darkness, have now their lot in these pleasant places.—The freed captives are made children of the family of heaven; 2 Cor. vi. 18, “And I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” So it is the liberty of the sons of God, for God makes all the freed slaves sons of his house; and whatever children may expect from a father, able and willing to do for them, this they may expect from God. The freed captives are all made first-born: Heb. xii. 23, “The general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven.” This excellence of dignity and power is put upon them, they are thus highly advanced. As it was with Joseph, he not only got his liberty but was made lord over Egypt, where he had been a slave; so the freed captive is made king: Rev. i. 6, “And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” This is accomplished in them all, Isa. xiv. 2, “They shall rule over their oppressors.” They get mastery over their lusts, and shall at last triumph over Satan, Rom. xvi. 20. They shall sit and judge him, 1 Cor. vi. 3. They are made priests also, to offer up sacrifices of praise to God, Rom. xii. 1. O what a change of their work! They are all heirs of God, and receive the double portion. There is not anything which such an one gets, but it is twice as much and good as that which a captive of Satan has. The blessing is the best half; this the captives of Satan want. *Lastly*, When their minority is over, they shall have a perfect liberty, with the affluence of all things, to an entire completing of their happiness, Rom. viii. 21. O the glorious day abiding Christ’s freemen! Now they have got the word, Roll away the stone, Lazarus come forth; but then this will be added, Loose him and let him go. The great day will begin their eternal jubilee; when death the last enemy shall be destroyed, then shall soul and body return to the full possession of the mortgaged inheritance, and the perfect freedom from their captivity. Consider,

(5.) The unchangeableness of this liberty. When once a captive is freed by Christ, all the power and policy of hell cannot bring him back again into bondage: John x. 28, "And I will give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish; neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand." See how Paul boasts of this, Rom. viii. 38, 39. It is true, were there none to preserve this liberty but the believer himself, it might be lost; but it is infallibly guarded against the gates of hell, by the unalterable decree of God, 2 Tim. ii. 19; by his unchangeable love and covenant; by the continual indwelling of the Spirit, and the prevalent intercession of Christ.

*Lastly*, Consider the eternity of this liberty. Death does not put a close to this liberty, but rather gives a new beginning to it; it shall continue for ever, they shall live for ever and ever in the enjoyment of it.

Thus life and death are set before you, will you accept this liberty or not? May I not say, how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" Heb. ii. 3. Consider,

1. That it is most unreasonable to refuse it, to remain in captivity after the proclamation of liberty is issued. Would men but make their reason judge betwixt Christ and them, there would be no fear of the cause, Josh. xxiv. 15. Who would refuse their liberty, if they might be made free? liberty from such a master and such work &c.; liberty purchased from such a glorious person, by the glorious King, at such a ransom, &c. Consult your reason, your interest, and will you prefer the pleasures of sin for a season, to the eternal rivers of pleasures at God's right hand? Consider,

2. That every refusal makes your captivity the more firm and hopeless. Satan bores the ear of sinners anew to his door-post on every refusal. Hence none so hard to win, as those who have refused many gospel calls. Tyre and Sidon would be much easier wrought upon than Chorazin and Bethsaida, Matth. xi. 21; Ezek. iii. 7; wild Americans, than Scotsmen. For when the gospel does not soften the heart, it is hardened under it. Consider,

3. That by refusing this liberty, you become the murderers of your own souls. Prov. viii. 39, "He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death." Hear, sinners, how our Lord expostulates with you on this point, Ezek. xviii. 31, 32, "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; Wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." You have the poisonous cup of your sins at your head, will ye drink it? ye say, ye cannot help it, ye must drink it

off; our Lord says, Throw it away, it will be your death if you do not. Come to me, and I will free you from this miserable bondage to Satan and your lusts, so that they shall not have that power over you which they have had. Well, if you will not comply, you are murderers of your own soul with a witness, as really as if ye did wilfully drink up a cup of poison, or stabbed yourselves with a sword. Consider,

4. That if you refuse, you make the deliverer your enemy, and shall not escape, Heb. ii. 3, The deliverer will turn your destroyer, for neglecting his salvation. The Lamb of God will be as a lion to you, for slighting his offers of grace. They who know not God, and who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. As the sourest vinegar is made of the best wine, so the fiercest wrath arises from slighting the greatest grace, Prov. i. 24—31. Consider,

5. That ye know not how soon ye may be beyond the reach of the proclamation of liberty, Luke xiii. 24, 25. The voice of it is not heard on the other side of death, to which we are fast making way. Do you not see, as in Psalm xc. 9, that "we spend our days as a tale that is told?" A new-year's day, and other days adjoining to it, are very ill chosen for revelling, jollity, and carnal mirth; they suit it nearly as ill as does the pretended day of Christ's birth, commonly called Yule-day. Alas! they will give themselves the loose run in these things, because they are now a year nearer the grave and eternity than they were; because they are entered on a new year, the end of which it may be they shall never see. If people will make a difference between such days and others, it would be most suitable in these days to take a solemn and serious view of eternity, and to be making preparations for that day, which will put an end to their years. However, let this time put you in mind of death's approach, and refuse not the offer of grace, which you will have no more, when once death has carried you off the stage.\* Consider,

*Lastly,* That your judgment will be more grievous than that of those who never heard the gospel, if you do not come away upon the proclamation; Matth. xi. 22, "But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment, than for you." Remember double stripes are for him who knew his master's will, and did it not; and the hottest place in hell will be for gospel-despisers. Men may have their lusts and sinful courses cheaper in the dark corner of the earth, than in a land of light.

\* It would appear that this discourse was delivered the first day, or at least the first Sabbath, of a new year.

We conclude with the following advices. Labour to get a just esteem of your souls, and a due sense of what concerns another life. The soul is the man, as being the best part of the man, the loss of which nothing can ever counterbalance. Matth. xvi. 26, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The other life is the life chiefly to be cared for, since that only is the life which will have no end; and a man is happy or unhappy, as his plan for that life is well or ill laid. Be sensible of the real drudgery of sin. It is as real a servitude as ever was in the world, while men serve divers lusts. This is clear from the very light of nature: the consideration of the noble nature of the soul, with the experience of the tyranny of unruly passions, made some heathen moralists to lay it down as a principle, That a wise man is a free man. Wherefore, believe that a holy life is the only true liberty; Psalm cxix. 44, 45, "So shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty; for I seek thy precepts." He, then, who has the mastery over his own corrupt will and inclinations, who walks in the way of God's commandments, is a person the most free and easy. *Lastly*, Come to Christ for his redeeming blood and free spirit. Renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh. Receive and improve Jesus, as made of God unto you, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Amen.

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JESUS OPENS THE PRISON DOORS TO THE PRISONERS.

SERMON LIV.

ISAIAH lxi. 1,

*And the opening of the prison to them that are bound.*

HERE is another benefit which, in the gospel, is brought by Christ to sinners who are in their natural state, namely, a proclamation as to opening the prison to the prisoners. In this there are two things.

1. The misery of a natural state, which is here laid out in its full extent, in three particulars. You have heard that unconverted sinners are Satan's captives; this is a sad case, but it is yet worse; for,

(1.) They are also prisoners. Every captive is not a prisoner, but all natural men, being Satan's captives, are held prisoners, shut up in the prison of their natural state. This is Satan's prison, crammed full of his prisoners of war. But this is not all; for,