

Deliverance from the Power of Darkness

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"Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. For he has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Col. 1:12, 13

True religion must be everything or nothing with us. In religion, indifference is ruin; neglect is destruction. Of all losses the loss of the soul is the only one that is utterly irreparable and irremediable. You may lose property, but you may recover the whole or a portion of it; you may lose health, but you may be restored to a larger measure of bodily strength than before your illness; you may lose friends, but you may obtain new ones, and those more sincere and valuable than any whom you have lost; you may lose reputation, but, like the sun behind a cloud, your character may shine with brighter luster than ever; you may lose life itself, as the blessed martyrs lost it in the flames of Smithfield, and yet find it, as the Lord himself declares— "He that finds his life shall lose it— and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:39.) But if you lose your soul, what is to make up for that loss? What does the Lord himself say? "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?" (Matt. 16:26.)

Do you ever feel what a tremendous stake heaven or hell is? Have you ever felt that to gain heaven is to gain everything that can make the soul eternally happy, and to lose heaven is not only to lose eternal bliss, but to sink down into unfathomable, everlasting, unutterable woe? It is this believing sight and pressing sense of eternal things; it is this weighty, at times overpowering, feeling that they carry in their bosom an immortal soul which creates and keeps alive the exercises of the children of God, often makes them view the things of time and sense as mere toys and baubles, trifles lighter than vanity and pursuits empty as air, and gives them to feel that the things of eternity are the only solid, enduring realities.

The Apostle in the text, filled with a sense of these eternal realities, lifts up his heart in holy adoration, and calls upon the saints to join with him in thankfulness to the God of all their mercies, for what he has done for those who fear his great and glorious name, whom, by an act of sovereign, distinguishing grace, he has plucked as brands from the burning, and given a title to, and fitness for eternal bliss— "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. For he has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

Who are these whom the Apostle thus calls upon to give thanks unto the Father? Who are these whom he addresses as made fit to be partakers of this glorious inheritance? As delivered from the power of darkness and translated by a divine act into the kingdom of God's dear Son? It is "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ" to whom the epistle is addressed, of whose "faith in Christ Jesus and love to all the saints" he had heard, to whom the word of the truth of the gospel had come, and in whom it was bringing forth its blessed fruit."

In opening up the words before us, I shall, with God's help and blessing—

I. First, show what is the power of darkness, and how God delivers us from it.

II. Secondly, what the kingdom of God's dear Son is, and how the Lord translates us into it.

III. Thirdly, what is the inheritance of the saints in light, and how God makes us fit to be partakers of it.

IV. And lastly, how an experimental enjoyment of these divine blessings makes us give thanks unto the Father who has wrought these wonders for us and these marks of his grace in us.

May the Lord enable me so to speak that his own power and unction may accompany the word with a divine blessing to your hearts.

I. What is the power of darkness, and how God delivers us from it. The Apostle speaks of "the power of darkness." I shall, therefore, with God's blessing, explain first what "darkness" is, and then enter into the meaning of the expression "the power of darkness."

A. By "DARKNESS" we may understand several things, according to the testimony of the inspired record and the various meanings which it bears therein.

1. First, "darkness" is often used in the scriptures to signify ignorance, and especially that ignorance of God and godliness into which all men have been cast, by the transgression of our first parent. Used in that sense, it denotes that absolute, complete ignorance of everything spiritual, heavenly, and divine, that black and gloomy cloud of worse than midnight, deeper than Egyptian darkness, which broods so thickly and settles so densely over the minds of men. Thus the prophet speaks— "Darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people." (Isaiah 60:2.) And again— "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light— those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined." (Isaiah 9:2.) So also— "And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:5.) In all these passages— and there are many more such in scripture— the word "darkness" is used to signify that dense ignorance which broods over the minds of men, so that they cannot see or know, understand or feel anything of the power of God's truth. Well has David described their state, "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness." (Psalm 82:5.)

This is the state described by the prophet as quoted by John, "Therefore they could not believe, because Elijah said again, He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they could not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:39, 40.) In this state all men are by nature, and in this state thousands live and die, ignorant of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, and therefore destitute of eternal life.

2. But "darkness" has in scripture another meaning— that of sin. Thus the Apostle speaks— "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:11.) We know that darkness favors sin; that when the sun goes down and night covers the earth, that is the time for the sinner to creep abroad to practice his deeds of wickedness. Just as the owl, when the sun declines and the shades of night fall, comes out of her ivy tower in quest of her prey, so does the ungodly sinner come forth in the evening gloom or the midnight hour to commit, under the veil of night, those deeds that shun the light of day.

There is in man a natural conscience. There is in people generally an approval of what is morally right and a disapproval of what is morally wrong; and there are laws founded upon these innate principles of right and wrong which punish, and that most wisely and justly, evil doers. To avoid, therefore, these heavy strokes of human justice, for they fear nothing else, the thief, the murderer, the midnight prowler issue forth to do their deeds of darkness.

3. But the Holy Spirit uses the word as indicative of a still further meaning. We read of "the rulers of the darkness of this world." (Eph. 6:12.) And the Lord said to those who came to apprehend him— "This is your hour and the power of darkness." (Luke 22:53.) Satan is emphatically "the prince of darkness." For as "God is light" (1 John 1:5.) and "dwells in the light which no man can approach unto," so the enemy of God and man is the ruler of darkness, and when cast out of his present usurped dominion as the prince of the power of the air, will be shut up in the blackness of darkness forever.

The darkness of ignorance and sin in which men walk favors his deep designs. The blindness of man allows him to set his snares unperceived, and the mad love of sin hurries the poor blinded wretch into them. Satan was once an angel of light, a pure and bright seraph shining in the courts of heaven as the morning star in the Eastern sky, resplendent in beauty and glory; but pride and disobedience hurled him down and turned him into a foul fiend, and now holds him in chains and darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Isaiah. 14:12; Jude 6.)

4. But there is still another meaning of the word "darkness"— namely, eternal misery; as Jude speaks, "To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever." In darkness itself there is something naturally miserable. If you were walking across a common on a dark night, when no stars twinkled in the sky and no moon gave its friendly light, and you wished to get home, but stumbled every step you took and had utterly missed your way, were there no other causes of anxiety and fear, such as inclement weather, fatigue, or hunger, the very feeling of darkness would be sufficient misery of itself. As light contains in its bosom the seeds of joy and happiness, so darkness enfolds in its breast the very elements of wretchedness and misery. To be shut up in a railway tunnel for an hour is very disagreeable; to be there all night would be misery.

But to be shut up in the blackness of darkness forever and ever, O, what heart can conceive or tongue express the weight of that woe? The unfathomable misery of being cast into outer darkness, where no beams of mercy and grace ever shine, but the lightning flashes and devouring thunderbolts of God's eternal and unappeasable

wrath forever beat upon the sinner's head; to be forever shut out of heaven with all its bliss, and crushed into hell with all its horror and all its despair— language fails to give utterance to so fearful a doom.

B. But the Apostle speaks of the "POWER of darkness." It is not only from darkness such as I have described, but from the power of darkness that we are delivered. To bring this more clearly before you, I shall take up those four meanings which I have thus far opened up, and explain individually the power of darkness in them all.

1. Ignorance— what power there is in ignorance! That "knowledge is power," has passed into a proverbial maxim; but it has been overlooked that ignorance is power also. What can you do with an ignorant man? You need a difficult and delicate piece of work to be done, and you get hold of an ignorant workman— what can you do with him? His ignorance will beat your skill, clever as you are. If he cannot comprehend what is to be done or how to do it, what a power there is in that ignorance! Is it not stronger than all your knowledge? Or take another case— that of a man completely ignorant of business— how unpleasant, how all but impossible it is to transact business with him! His ignorance is a barrier which you can neither push down nor get through. There is, then, the power of ignorance as well as the power of knowledge.

Men speak sometimes of "the pride of knowledge." Doubtless there is a pride of knowledge; but is there not a pride of ignorance? Are not some men as proud of their ignorance as others are of their knowledge? Some think that the poor cannot be proud; but I have known them every whit as proud as the rich; no, I have seen ignorant men more proud of their ignorance than learned men of their learning.

Now the power of ignorance as regards the things of God is amazing. You can do something with a man who is willing to be taught; you can instruct one who is desirous to learn; you can communicate knowledge to one of a childlike, teachable spirit. But a man who is filled with the strongest self-conceit and self-complacency, in ignorance, and will not listen, has a barrier in his ignorance thoroughly ammunition-proof to the reception of all knowledge. I have sometimes both sighed and smiled at the contented ignorance of people into whose company I have been thrown— sighed at their folly and smiled at their conceit.

And how the power of ignorance in the mind of man especially shows itself as regards religion, and what strength and influence it possesses! What prejudice, what enmity, what obstinacy, what unbelief, what self-righteousness, what desperate determination never to give way to any conviction or lend an ear to any instruction it manifests! I have been in this town more than twenty years preaching the gospel and showing the way of salvation from the unerring word of God; my sermons and writings have been spread far and wide in this country, and yet how few, speaking comparatively, in this town have received the love of the truth so as to be saved thereby! In fact, so great is the power of darkness over the minds of men, that nothing but the power of God can deliver them from it. No man ever delivered himself; no man ever delivered another. God alone, by his mighty power, as the Apostle declares in the text, delivers from it the children of the kingdom.

2. But darkness, I have just hinted, signifies also sin. The power of darkness is then the power of sin as well as of ignorance; and this is a power unfathomable and indescribable. The great strength of sin consists in this— that it is a subtle and secret influence pervading and permeating every thread and fiber of the human mind, and acting in a way that must be felt to be known. It is like a river, deep and rapid, such as the Danube, but flowing along so quietly and noiselessly that, looking down upon it, you could scarcely believe there was any strength in the stream. Try it; get into it. As long as you let yourself float with it you will not perceive its force; but turn and swim or row against it; then you will soon find what strength there is in the stream that seemed to glide so quietly along.

So it is with the power of sin. As long as a man floats down the stream of sin, he is unconscious of the power that it is exercising over him. He gives way to it, and is therefore ignorant of its strength, though it is sweeping him along into an abyss of eternal woe. Let him oppose it. Or let a dam be made across the river that seemed to flow along so placidly. See how the stream begins to rise! See how it begins to rage and roar! And see how soon its violence will sweep over or carry away the barrier that was thrown across it! So with the strength of sin. Serve sin— obey it— it seems to have no strength. Resist it— then you find its secret power, so that but for the strength of God, you would be utterly carried away by it.

3. But I intimated that darkness signified Satan, because he is the Prince of Darkness. And thus the "power of darkness" is the power that Satan exercises over the human mind. Satan has access to every avenue of the human heart. He is a spirit of amazing wisdom and knowledge; and in addition to all the power of angelic intellect, which he retains, though fallen, having had the experience of nearly six thousand years, he has become thoroughly acquainted with all the propensities of our mind, and with what I may perhaps call the weak

side of man. He knows exactly where to lay siege— where to place his traps and snares. He knows how to darken the mind, to stir up its lusts and passions, to strengthen the innate force of sin, and so to work upon the pride, prejudice, enmity, infidelity, unbelief, and self-righteousness so deeply imbedded in the human heart, as to give them all a power that they would not have but for his secret operation and influence. He therefore is said to be "the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience."

4. And then there is the power of hell, the visitations of despondency and despair, the gloomy doubts and fears that sink many awakened souls into an apprehension of wrath to come; under a feeling sense of guilt upon the conscience. Now these four things combined make up "the power of darkness." Who can deliver us from this power? Nothing short of an Almighty hand! nothing but the invincible grace of God!

C. How does the Lord deliver us from the power of darkness? I will show you. He delivers us by a work of grace upon our heart. And he may be said in a sense to deliver the very moment that this grace commences its divine and blessed operations. There is, if I may use the expression, an initial deliverance— deliverance in its beginning; not carried on, not completed, but commenced. I will illustrate this by taking the figure of Joseph in the prison. Joseph was in prison, and there the iron entered into his soul. Was there any hope of Joseph's coming forth except to experience the death that the King's baker met with— to be hung upon a gallows— for a crime imputed to, but not committed by him? But when God put the chief butler and the chief baker into the same prison, he began to work a plan for Joseph's deliverance; and especially when he put it into the heart of Pharaoh to dream a dream which none of the wise men could interpret. Joseph was still in prison; but when the messenger came from Pharaoh to summon him into the royal presence to interpret the dream, that was the manifested commencement of his deliverance. But Joseph had not shaved himself. The Egyptians did not wear their beards like the children of Israel. Joseph could not therefore go into the King's presence with his beard upon his face. Besides, he was in his ragged prison clothes, his hair was matted with filth, and his clothes were soiled with the dirt of the jail. He could not go forth until he had washed himself, had his beard shaved off, and suitable clothes put upon him. But even when he was taken out of prison he was not fully delivered, because he might have to go back. But when he had told the King his dream, and Pharaoh took off his ring and put it upon his hand, arrayed him in fine linen, laid a gold chain upon his neck, made him ride in the second chariot, and set him as ruler over all the land of Egypt, then Joseph's deliverance was accomplished.

You will, therefore, see that in Joseph's case there was initial deliverance before accomplished deliverance. So it is in grace. The first ray of light, life, and divine teaching that enters the soul out of the fullness of the Son of God, is an initial deliverance. It is delivered thereby from the power of darkness. The darkness of ignorance no longer holds it down. Light has broken in to destroy that power.

Take it in nature. The earth is immersed in darkness. How is that darkness to be done away? Suppose there were a council of wise men called to devise means whereby it might be dispersed. They might propose various plans to illuminate the darkness, such as gas lamps, the electric light, an imitation sun to be suspended in the sky by poles and ropes; but all their plans would end in disappointment. The power of darkness would beat them. They might illuminate a room, a street, or a town; but all their candles and wax lights and illuminations would never enlighten the face of the whole earth. But when, in the midst of all their plans and lamps, tubes and pipes, the sun began to cast his first dawning beams across the morning sky, and those beams were refracted by the atmosphere over our globe, then the power of darkness would begin to be destroyed; the strength of the night which had held the earth down in obscurity would be broken; and long before the sun himself rose the shadows of gloom would have fled, as if frightened and dismayed by the approach of their mighty and glorious and irresistible conqueror.

1. So in the things of God— the weighty matters of salvation. The first dawn of grace upon your soul— the first breaking in of divine light, destroys the power of ignorance. It shows you the majesty, justice, holiness, and power of God; it convinces you of your lost, ruined condition; it discovers the dreadful evil of sin; it lays you low at the footstool of mercy; it makes you beg for some manifestation of pardon and salvation to your soul. And not only so, but it breaks the pride as well as the power of ignorance; makes you teachable and childlike; and, showing you your blindness and folly, leads you to ask wisdom of God, and seek constant guidance and direction from him. You now see what a prejudiced, blind bigot you were, and with all your knowledge and profession had not one glimmer of saving light in your heart. You turn from error and bend towards truth, like a plant to the light. Is not all this a delivery from the power of darkness?

2. So with the power of sin. When a man begins to feel the burden of sin, to cry out under its guilt, to be deeply exercised as to the state of misery and condemnation into which his transgressions have brought him, and to fear lest his dreadful iniquities should be a millstone round his neck to sink him into the depths of hell, he begins to be delivered from the power of sin. He breaks off his old habits and from his old companions; the

outer branches, at any rate, of sin are lopped off; and he is delivered from the power of those practices in which he lived heedlessly, thoughtlessly, without guilt for the present or fear for the future. If not yet delivered from the guilt and condemnation of sin in his conscience, he is delivered from its outward practice and performance. And as the Lord carries on the work begun he is delivered in due time, by the application of atoning blood, from its guilt, and is saved by the love of God shed abroad in his heart from its reigning dominion and power.

3. He is delivered also from the power of Satan. The strong man armed once kept his palace, but the stronger than he has come upon him and overcome him. The Lion of Judah delivers from the power of the dog. (Psalm. 22:20.) The eagle soaring in the sky will not allow the vulture to come near. Jesus Christ drives back the Prince of darkness, and says— "This once slave of yours, is now mine— my property and my possession; I have redeemed him by my blood; he shall be an eternal trophy of my victory over sin, death, and hell. Satan, avaunt! Touch him not. He is a chosen vessel; you no longer have power over him."

It was so with Joshua, the High Priest, whom Zechariah saw standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. "And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke you, O Satan; even the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you— is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (Zech. 3:1, 2.) What could Satan say or do in the presence of that sore, and great, and strong sword with which the Lord has declared he will punish leviathan, the crooked serpent, and slay the dragon that is in the sea? (Isaiah. 28.)

4. And then there is the last power of darkness, "the blackness of darkness forever," a power which will never cease to hold fast the sons and daughters of perdition, but which will never close its mouth upon any who know, fear, and love God. The grave will indeed for a while hold their earthly tabernacles that they may return to their native dust; but Jesus, the resurrection and the life, has conquered for them death and hell, and they shall all stand before the throne of his glory with palms of victory in their hands; shall all sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and shout "Victory, victory through atoning blood!"

II. But I pass on to show what it is to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. God the Father has given his Son a kingdom; and this kingdom he appointed to him before the foundation of the world. Nothing can be more plainly revealed in the Scriptures of truth than these two points—

1. That Christ has a kingdom.
2. That his people have a portion in it.

How plainly does the Lord speak— "And I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father has appointed unto me." (Luke 22:29.) This is the kingdom spoken of in Matt. 25, where the King says unto those on his right hand, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34.) This kingdom Christ received from his Father's hands when he said unto him— "Ask of me, and I shall give you the heathen for your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." (Psalm. 2:8.)

In this gift God gave him a people in whom he would be eternally glorified; Christ received this people at his Father's hands, and thus became their King and head. And this is called in Scripture "the kingdom of God's dear Son." It is the kingdom spoken of in Daniel, which is to be erected upon the ruins of all the other monarchies— "Which shall never be destroyed, but shall stand forever." It is therefore said of it, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Psalm. 45:6); and that "his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away." (Dan. 7:14.) This kingdom is present and future; the kingdom of grace here and the kingdom of glory hereafter. Nor will any one share in the glory who does not partake of the grace. This kingdom, therefore, must be an internal kingdom, as the Lord told the Jews— "The kingdom of God is within you;" and is described by Paul, in language most expressive of its inward blessedness— "The kingdom of God is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17.)

But there is a being "translated into this kingdom." The word "translated" means a transferring, a removal, a bringing a man out of one state and putting him into another. Nor can this mighty act of God's grace, this work of sovereign love and power, take place without some experience of it in a man's own heart. It is impossible for a man to be translated by a divine work upon his conscience from a state of darkness to a state of light— from a state of condemnation to a state of justification— from a state of guilt to a state of pardon— from a state of misery to a state of happiness— from a state of the dominion of sin to a state of the dominion of righteousness, without his being sensible of it, without his having had an experience in his soul when and where and how it was done. To be translated, then, into the kingdom of God's dear Son is to be brought out of that darkness, death, guilt, misery, and condemnation arising out of a sense of the curse of the Law, and transferred by a mighty act of his victorious and invincible grace, into the kingdom of his dear Son, that he, and he alone, may reign and rule in the heart.

Though an act of power, it is no act of violence. God does not translate us into the kingdom of his dear Son in spite of ourselves, or contrary to the inclinations and desires of our heart. "Your people," he says to Christ, "shall be willing in the day of your power." (Psalm. 110:3.) He first shows us by his Spirit and grace the misery of sin, and makes us long for pardon and peace, for reconciliation and acceptance. He shows us the wretchedness of a state of alienation from Himself, the Fountain of all happiness and holiness, and makes us long for the shedding abroad of his love to bring us near, and to enable us to love him with a pure heart fervently. He gives us to see what bondslaves we have been to sin and Satan, and makes us long for that holy liberty with which he makes his people free. He shows us what guilt and misery we have brought upon ourselves through our own transgressions as well as that of our first parent. He works a repentance of these sins— a self-abhorrence on account of them, a departing from them and a fleeing to the blood and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, to hide in him from every storm.

When, then, in answer to prayer and supplication, he reveals to the soul, the Person and work, grace and love, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and raises up a living faith in his blessed Majesty, by virtue of that faith it passes from death into life, from condemnation into justification, from bondage into liberty; and thus becomes feelingly and experimentally translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, that he may reign and rule in the heart as its only God and King— its rightful Sovereign and enthroned Lord.

None but God, the Holy Spirit, by his Almighty power, can thus take a poor sinner in all his guilt and filth, rags and ruin, in all his condemnation, misery, and wretchedness, and by applying the word of his grace with power to his soul, by sending a sweet promise home to his heart, by revealing Christ in his blood and righteousness, and shedding abroad his love, can translate him feelingly and experimentally into that kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And this God is doing, has done, or will do for all who are really and truly his. No strength of the creature, no arm of the flesh can avail here. Mercy and grace do it all; love and power combine, and reaching down, as it were, their arms from heaven, lift up the sinner from the power of darkness and bear him into the kingdom of light, and life; and liberty, where Jesus is all in all.

III. But I must now show what it is to "be made fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." And first a few words to point out who these saints in light are.

I understand these saints to be the same as those whom Paul calls (Hebrews 3:23) "the spirits of just men made perfect;" those glorious spirits before the throne who departed in the faith, and hope, and love of Jesus— who have dropped their earthly tabernacle, and are delivered from all the miseries, sorrows, sins, and infirmities of this present time-state; and who now, with their immortal souls purified from all spot and speck of transgression, in the realms of bliss, see the Lamb face to face. These are those whom he is leading to the fountain of living water, who are singing upon their golden harps the praises of Immanuel, who are ever drinking at those streams that make glad the city of God, and in one ceaseless noonday of immortal happiness are clothed with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

These are "the saints in light" spoken of in our text whose inheritance is God himself; for the saints are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. As God gave the Levites no portion among their brethren, because he was their inheritance (Deut. 10:9); so God is the inheritance of the saints in light. His love, his presence, his glory, a view of him in the Person of the glorified Immanuel, and the holy bliss and ravishing delights that flow into their immortal spirits from their union with the Father and the Son, perfecting them in happiness and holiness— this is the inheritance of the saints in light in the realms above.

O, what a contrast with the portion of the eternally lost! Look at the inheritance that sin gives as compared with the inheritance of the saints. "The wages of sin is death." Hear the groans of the damned in hell; mark the despair that ever gnaws their tortured spirits; see them weltering in fire and brimstone, under the tremendous displeasure of an incensed Jehovah; look at outraged Justice darting down flames of lightning upon them from above, while a sea of fire from below rolls over them its burning billows, and hell with its iron bars closes over them forever shutting out all hope and all end. Contrast this eternal sense of misery and woe, this fearful doom of the lost spirits in hell, with the happy lot of the saints in light, singing upon their golden harps, without a cloud of sin or sorrow, the praises of God and the Lamb.

You must be one or the other— saint or sinner; and you will be either singing the praises of God in heavenly bliss, or howling forever and ever in unutterable woe.

But we are to be "made fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." If the Queen were to send you an invitation to dine with her in her royal palace, would you not seek some fitting garment in which to sit

down at the table of majesty? If you are a laborer or a mechanic, would you go in your work clothes, with all the dirt and filth of the field or the workshop upon them? You would need to be made fit for such a presence and such company. So it is with those who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. There is a being made fit for the inheritance. In what consists this fitness?

1. First, you are to be washed. As the high priest could not go into the tabernacle unless he had first washed himself from head to foot in the bronze laver, so no soul can enter the courts of heaven unless he be washed. As the Apostle says— "Such were some of you, but you are washed." (1 Cor. 6:11.) You must be washed in the blood of the Lamb— all your sins and transgressions must be washed away in that fountain which was once opened for all sin and all uncleanness in a Savior's wounded side, or you will never partake of the inheritance of the saints in light. The blood of Jesus must be applied to your conscience; pardon must be sealed upon your soul; Christ must be revealed to you as having washed you from all your sins in his own precious blood, or you cannot join in that glorious anthem, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Rev. 1:5.)

2. Again, you must be justified. "Whom he called, them he also justified." We read of one who came to the marriage and had not on a wedding garment, and we hear the fearful sentence passed by the King upon that man— "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Such was the sentence of the man who presumed to sit down to the marriage supper without a wedding garment— a type of Christ's righteousness; for we read of the Lamb's wife, that she was arrayed in "fine linen, clean and white," which is declared to be "the righteousness of saints." (Rev. 19:8.) As Joshua the high priest had his filthy garments taken from him, so you cannot be made fit for the inheritance unless you have your filthy garments taken off, and, like him, "be clothed with change of clothing." (Zech. 3:4.) To be found so clothed was Paul's desire— "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Phil. 3:9.)

3. The third requisite, is to be sanctified. You will find the three requisites all named in one verse by Paul— "And such were some of you; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) To be "sanctified" is to be made a partaker of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; to be made a new creature; to "put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"— in a word, to be "made a partaker of the divine nature," and thus have the holiness of God breathed into and communicated to the soul.

Without this inward sanctification, none can enter the gates of heaven. What would heaven be to you if you had not an inward fitness for it? Suppose you could be washed in atoning blood and clothed in justifying righteousness, and were taken to heaven (if it could be so, which is impossible), having no new heart, no new spirit, no inward element of holiness breathed into your soul by the Spirit of God. In such a case, heaven would be no heaven to you— you would want to get out of it; the presence of a holy God would appall you; the saints in bliss singing the praises of the Lamb would be so foreign to your every feeling, that you would say— "Send me to hell, for I have no heart to enjoy heaven. Let me go to hell, where I can curse and blaspheme, hate and howl, for I cannot love and praise— hell, hell is the only fit place for me."

To be made fit, therefore, for the heavenly inheritance, you must have a heavenly heart and a praising, adoring, loving spirit; you must delight yourself in the Lord as being so holy and yet so gracious, so pure and yet so loving, so bright and glorious and yet so condescending and sympathizing. Now this fitness for the holiness, happiness, and employments of heaven is communicated at regeneration, in which the new man of grace, though weak is still perfect.

Look at the thief upon the cross— what an instance is he how the Spirit of God can in a moment make a man fit for heaven! Here was a vile malefactor, whose life had been spent in robbery and murder, brought at last to suffer the just punishment of his crimes; and as we are told that "they who were crucified with him reviled him" (Mark 15:32), we have reason to believe that at first he partook with his brother malefactor in blaspheming the Redeemer. But sovereign grace, (and what but sovereign grace?), touched his heart, brought him to see and feel what he was as a ruined sinner, opened his eyes to view the Son of God bleeding before him, raised up faith in his soul to believe in his name, and created a spirit of prayer that the Lord of heaven and earth would remember him when he came into his kingdom— perhaps the greatest act of faith we have recorded in all Scripture, almost equal if not superior to the faith of Abraham when he offered up Isaac on the altar.

The dying Redeemer heard and answered his cry, and said to him— "Today shall you be with me in Paradise." Spirit and life accompanied the words, and raised up at once in his soul a fitness for the inheritance, and before

the shadows of night fell, his happy spirit passed into Paradise, where he is now singing the praises of God and of the Lamb.

Many a poor child of God has gone on almost to his last hours on earth without a manifestation of pardoning love and the application of atoning blood; but he has not been allowed to die without the Holy Spirit revealing salvation to his soul, and attuning his heart to sing the immortal anthem of the glorified spirits before the throne.

IV. This leads us to my last point, which is the "giving thanks unto the Father" for all these visitations of his grace, for all these blessed manifestations of his goodness and love. Have you any hope, any inward testimony, that the Lord has by his Spirit wrought these miracles of mercy and grace in your heart? As I have been describing the work of grace, has there been any echo in your bosom which made you believe that you have been delivered from the power of darkness and been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and though you do not find all that fitness for heaven that your soul could desire, the Lord has given you such a measure of faith, hope, and love as makes you feel that you could enjoy the holiness of heaven if the Lord were pleased to bring you there? O, what thanks and praises are due to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, if he has wrought these things in your soul, for his unspeakable mercy in stretching forth his hand to save you!

What would have been our gloomy case, even as regards this present world, and what would have been our still more gloomy case as regards our eternal condition, if God had not stretched forth his hand to deliver us from the power of darkness? We would have lived under the power of darkness, until we had sunk into the blackness of darkness forever. We would have loved and hugged and been proud of our darkness, and have fallen, as thousands fall, self-deceived and miserable victims to the ignorance, pride, and self-righteousness of our fallen nature.

But God was determined to break in upon our benighted souls, and when he broke in, darkness fled. When he appeared, Satan fled, and when he shone, light and life burst in, And thus the Lord was pleased to deliver us from the power of darkness and translate us into the kingdom of his dear Son. And shall we not render thanks and praises, and adore his blessed Majesty for these acts of his grace, these manifestations of his mercy, goodness, and love?

But I cannot conclude without dropping a word of warning to those who are still under the power of darkness. Though I know they cannot deliver their own souls, yet the Lord may, by a word spoken from my lips, carry conviction to their mind. The Lord may use me as an instrument to show them their state by nature; and may— I pray that he may— in his infinite mercy raise up that sigh and cry in their souls, which will lead in his own time and way to a blessed deliverance into the kingdom of his dear Son; and then they with us will join in ascribing praise and honor, power and glory, to God and the Lamb forever!