

Horatius Bonar:

"So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." —Genesis 3:24

WE may safely conclude that this solemn act on the part of God is not separate from, or in contradiction of the previous promises of grace, but in fulfilment of it,—embodying an illustration or exposition of it. As generally interpreted, it stands alone, and speaks wholly of judgment, not of grace. But rightly read, it anticipates the apostle's statement, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life;" or if there be aught about it apparently stern or terrible, it amounts to nothing more than that in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest."

I. The expulsion. The holy dwelling so specially made for man can no longer be his abode. He has sinned it away. He is not to be cast out of earth, or even out of Eden; but out of Paradise he must go, that God may testify to the evil of sin. But the simple fact of his being left on earth,—nay, in Eden,—is a proclamation of God's forgiving love.

(1.) The Expeller. It is God himself. He who made Paradise for man, and set man in it! He expelled him. The expulsion and the introduction are the acts of the same Being.

(2.) The expelled. It is man,—nay, "the man," the same as mentioned before; the man so newly made, so greatly loved,—made in God's image, to represent him and to serve him!

(3.) The expelling. The word is a strong one,—driving out by force, as the nations of Canaan. In verse 23 we read, he "sent out"; but man would not go, so he is compelled to force him out! It is forcible ejection from a forfeited abode.

Paradise was the place of God's dwelling with man; and now either God or man must leave. If God leaves, man is hopeless; if man leaves, his place is still kept open for him by God. Even in the expulsion God shews his grace, His longsuffering, His unwillingness to leave man or man's earth. He desires still to have a habitation here. "This is my rest," He says.

II. The guard. This was a sword,—or rather, "the sword," the sword of fire, or "the flame of the sword,"—the sword which turned round every way, perhaps girdling Paradise with a flaming belt; the sword spoken of, Joshua 5:13; 1 Chronicles 21:16,27; Psalm 45:3; Isaiah 34:5,6; Ezekiel 21:5, Zechariah 13:7. It was placed, not simply to bar entrance, but to inflict death on all who should attempt to enter. It was "the veil"; but it was more. It told that the holiest was not opened; and that until God withdrew the barrier it was death for the sinner to enter. What more efficient, more terrible fence could there be? Sword and fire in one! God's sword and fire,—revolving, in life and power; making access an impossibility. Living fire, or fiery life! It is the shekinah in the form of a sword, as elsewhere in the form of a pillar, according to the purpose to be served. O man, canst thou re-enter Paradise without God's permission? Canst thou open the barred gate? Canst thou remove or quench the sword of fire? Thou canst not. There is one that shutteth and no man openeth; that kindleth and no man quenqueth. Only He can open who closed the gate; only He can quench the fire who kindled it; He who said, "Awake, O sword, against the man that is my fellow!" That sword is quenched,—in the blood of Jehovah's fellow, the gate is open, the access unchallenged and free!

But the special object of this fence was to keep the way to the tree of life, which was in the midst of the garden. The eating of this tree was to preserve man's immortality. As the common fruit of the garden was to uphold him against the tear and wear of each day; so the tree of life had in it special virtue; and it is no more inconsistent with man's immortality to say this than to say that he needed other food to maintain his life. It was "in the midst," as the most conspicuous and most accessible place: marking its importance and preeminence among the trees of the garden. The preservation of man's immortality was now no longer a desirable thing. Besides, it was forfeited. He was taught that there was immortality in store for him; but not through that tree. It must be reached through death. It must be the immortality of resurrection. His being debarred from the tree of life was the preliminary or preparatory step to his being taught this wondrous lesson which after ages were to evolve. Man shall one day approach the tree of life (Revelation 2:7); but not now! Death lies between him and life. Death is the gate of life; resurrection is our hope.

III. The new occupants. The cherubim now are set where man was. These are doubtless symbolic things, such

as those of gold in the tabernacle; or, if having the semblance of life, like those spoken of in Ezekiel and the Revelation, which are still symbolic, not real beasts or living creatures. Their appearance (earthly animals); their position on the mercy-seat; their being one with the mercy-seat, their being sprinkled with blood; the song they sing in Revelation, all tell us that they are redemption-symbols, proclaiming man, and man's earth with all its creatures, redeemed and glorified; man reintroduced into Paradise, higher than that from which he was driven out, the Paradise of God. These cherubim in the earthly Paradise are said to dwell there; not "set", but "made to tabernacle" there. They are placed there as in a dwelling, to indicate man's future restoration to the abode he had lost. The sight of them is good news to Adam. He and his seed are to be restored after all. They are not always to be banished; not always to worship at the gate, or stand upon the threshold. They are to re-enter and partake of the better tree in the better Paradise.

The way is now opened; the sword withdrawn; the invitation unrestricted and unconditional. A new and living way! Let us draw near! Without is condemnation, within is pardon; without is death, within is life and immortality. There is no barrier now; no veil; no hindrance; no distance; no uncertainty. The blood is shed and sprinkled. Through death, life has come. The tomb becomes the gate of life. Why stand we without, as if the sword of fire were still there, or as if the veil were not rent in twain? Why hesitate, or tremble, or doubt, when all is plain, and when God himself is beckoning us in? Let us come boldly to the throne of grace. Let us draw near with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith. Let us not linger on the threshold, but at once go in. The blood which has been shed on earth and accepted in heaven, is that which emboldens us to approach with confidence, not reckoning it possible that we can be sent empty away.