Isaiah - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Iniquity Taken Away, and Sin Purged

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Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips: and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:5-8).

It is very blessed to trace, in the Old Testament Scriptures, the gracious way in which God has ever been ready to meet man as a sinner, and to contemplate that way which has always been through the sacrificial work of His beloved Son. When our first parents had garments presented to them to cover their nakedness, they were formed of coats of skins, to show us that blessing could only flow from God to man through sacrifice. When Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, it was because of the excellency of the sacrifice which he offered. The whole ritual of the last dispensation teaches us that God can only be approached by man through the sacrifice of a life. Hence it is that there is so much in the ancient Scriptures about dealing with God through the death of the sacrifice; all intended to show forth that in due time God would provide an all-sufficient sacrifice for man as a sinner. But it is here that people so mistake; and Christ crucified is to many still a stumbling-stone and rock of offence. Man's thought in general, if he think of God at all, is about his sacrificing for God; thus vainly hoping to appease God, and procure rest for his conscience by some works of self-denial; but God meets such a false thought at once by saying,

I will have mercy, and not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13, 12:7).

This entails the most perfect self-sacrifice, because it lays on man the absolute necessity of setting self aside entirely, to confess the utter unworthiness of all self-righteousness, as well as of self altogether, and to rest only in Divine mercy, and on that sacrifice which God has so graciously provided. This has always been the teaching of God; and the same prophet, whose experience in the Lord's presence we are about to contemplate, afterwards published the solemn declaration, that

all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever (Isa. 40:6-8).

Thus we find that the Spirit of God in olden time taught men that they were sinners, and that their most goodly things were perishing and passing away; and gave them the unalterable word of the Lord, as an immoveable rock for their souls to stay upon. And so it is now.

The chapter before us begins very abruptly. It tells us that the prophet had this vision of glory

in the year that king Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1).

But why is Uzziah thus introduced? May it not be, among other things, to remind us that the very best man on earth, the highest potentate of Judah's kingdom, the most honored man in the world, stands in widest contrast with THE KING, THE LORD OF HOSTS?

King Uzziah was a leper, and dwelt outside the camp; which shows us that sinful man, however high in office and dignity, is unfit for the presence of God; that man has no resources at all for cleansing the leprosy of sin, and that except God undertake to meet him with healing mercy, he must still remain unclean, and unfit for association with the God of holiness. Hence, on referring to the king's history, as recorded in 2 Chron. 26:21, we are told, that Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.

Thus we find, on the very threshold of our subject, the humbling intimation of man's real character of uncleanness and distance from God, though he stand in the highest position of society, and hold the most exalted office, and that even among the most highly favored people on earth.

In considering this very instructive portion of the Holy Scripture, we shall notice:

1. The prophet's vision of glory.

2. The effect of it upon himself.

3. The assurance of forgiveness he obtained.

4. His willing obedience.

1. THE PROPHET'S VISION OF GLORY.

I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple (Isa. 6:1).

There, in spirit, before God, the prophet took his place. There he saw the seraphims, the servants of the most High God, His ministers that do His pleasure. He beheld them taking the place of profoundest reverence, covering their faces with two of their wings. He saw also that each of them covered his feet, to show that, while they had always walked obediently, they did not glory in their service, but with greatest humility gloried only in the Lord. He saw them also with outstretched wings, to signify their delight in doing God's will, and that they held themselves in readiness to fly swiftly at His bidding. He heard also the words uttered before the throne; he listened to the converse of creatures there,

and found it was

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts (Isa. 6:3);

and

at the voice of him that cried, the posts of the door moved, and the house was filled with smoke (see Isa. 6:4).

These things the prophet saw and heard. It was indeed an infinitely holy place. No unclean word was heard there; nothing impure escaped the lips of any; no irreverent action was seen; no presumptuous ways, no angry passions, no foolish actions, no indolent habits, no self-willed manners, were beheld there; for God is holy, and nothing unclean can abide His presence. The prophet was in the light, for God is light. He was beside the balance of the sanctuary, and all was love, and holiness, and truth.

2. THE EFFECT OF THE VISION. Deeply serious and personal reflections occupied the prophet's mind. Man never rightly learns what he is, except in God's presence. It is a well-known fact among men, that if we would understand the true qualities of anything, we must bring it to the light. So it is as regards things spiritual. We may compare ourselves with our fellow-men, and arrive at most erroneous conclusions; thus, the temperate man, measuring himself with a drunkard, believes himself righteous: and the chaste flatter themselves with thoughts of superiority over the licentious; while all may be equally guilty of covetousness, and other uncleanness, in the sight of God. It is therefore not wise to compare ourselves with our neighbours, but, coming into the light of God's holy presence, we shall be truly made manifest. When Isaiah considered the peace, love, humility, holiness, purity, and truth that characterized all those who dwelt in Jehovah's glorious presence, what could the prophet's reflections be? How could he fail to ask himself such questions as, "Am I truly humble before God? Do I serve Him with reverence? Do I delight to do the will of God? Has my conversation been holiness to the Lord?" Surely the prophet felt the light of God's presence to be a heart-searching region! It was enough to show him that he was "unclean! unclean!" that he had come short of God's standard. It was enough to make him feel that he stood "justly condemned" before God, and righteously exposed to His judgment and wrath. Hence he cried out,

Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5).

Now notice here, dear friends, that the prophet's intense distress was concerning himself:

Woe is ME! for I am undone; because I am unclean, &c.

He did not say, Woe are we! we are undone. No; true Christianity is a personal thing —

The heart knoweth his own bitterness (Prov. 14:10).

Many a sentimental professor in our day may be found ready to say, We are all sinners; we are not what we should be. Such talk about our Savior, our religion, our society, &c., thus casting themselves in with others in a lump. But this will not do for God. This is not as the Spirit teaches. He convinces each one of his own sin. He so makes the conscience sensible of its guilt as to cause it to cry out, What must I do to be saved?

God be merciful to ME a sinner (Luke 18:13).

If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole (Matt. 9:21).

Woe is ME! for I am undone.

But more than this, he felt he was unclean before God — a man of unclean lips. Those lips which ought to be, like the seraphim's, consecrated to His praises, had given utterance to the unclean thoughts and feelings of the heart; for

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Matt. 12:34).

Like another Job, he could say,

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor MYSELF, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5, 6).

The light of God's holy presence made his uncleanness manifest; he felt its depths so great, its blackness so foul, its wounds so incurable, that he condemned himself as undone — hopelessly and helplessly unclean before God; ungodly, unholy, without strength, without any hope of recovery in himself. Having thus learnt himself in God's presence, he was then able to discern that the people by whom he was surrounded were unclean also.

Such were the lessons that the prophet was effectually taught in God's presence. And so, in measure, all learn now who are under Divine teaching; for though we may not be favoured with such a vision of glory as the prophet had, yet the Holy Spirit makes us feel that we have to do with God, and that every creature is manifest in His sight. Moreover, when we now think of the presence of God, we see by faith the risen, ascended, and glorified Man, Christ Jesus. We see there, besides the holy seraphims, one who was a Man of Sorrows in this world of sin, one who was exposed to Satan's temptations, man's deceivings, and the world's unholiness; but He always did the will of Him that sent Him, and finished His work; yea, He delighted in it, however much suffering it entailed. He never uttered an unclean word, or cherished an unholy thought, but from first to last yielded an unblemished life of holy obedience, sealing it with His own blood. When our thoughts thus center around Him, a Lamb as it had been slain, now in the midst of the throne of heaven, we are bound to exclaim, that

all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way (Isa. 53:6)!

and that all our best works are unclean before God. How is it that people are not sensible of their guilt? Because they do not fear God; they do not consider what they are in God's sight; they do not come into His holy presence, and weigh in the balance of truth. When men begin to fear God, they consider that it is to Him they are responsible, as His creatures; that to Him they must give account; that He is the Judge of all; and that the holiness of heaven is the only true standard. Then they feel that they are sinners, rebels, unworthy, and have justly merited

banishment from His glorious presence. Then they are awakened to their real danger; they become deeply anxious about their eternal state; and feeling despair in self, they come to the throne of God, exclaiming,

Woe is me! for I am undone.

In this way only are we taught by the Spirit that we are lost and undone. Men may know that they are sinners by comparing themselves with others: thus the thief knows that he is a sinner, because he is surrounded by many who are honest; the unjust knows that he is a sinner, because he is acquainted with some who are upright, &c. In this way only can we account for so many persons who evince no soul-distress being so ready to say, “I know I am a sinner.” But when we are brought to think of ourselves as in God’s holy presence, then, whatever have been our previous conceptions of our fancied goodness, we are made to feel guilty before God, and exposed to His coming judgment and wrath. Then, I say, our cry is,

Woe is me! for I am undone.

3. Now let us consider THE ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS THE PROPHET OBTAINED. God in Christ is a blessed refuge for a sin- troubled soul; for He will be merciful to our unrighteousness, as was beautifully expressed by Elihu to Job:

God looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light (see Job 33:27, 28).

He will say,

Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom (Job 33:24)!

This seems to be the rule of the throne of grace, and was just what the prophet experienced; for while he stood thus consciously before the King, the Lord of Hosts, in a repentant mind, confessing his uncleanness, groaning over his sin, condemning himself, acknowledging his undone state, we are immediately told,

Then (mark, then!) flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isa. 6:6, 7).

This is very blessed. It shows us that God waiteth to be gracious. It is a striking instance of the mercy of God to sinful man, and manifests His readiness to pardon and accept those who take a right place before Him. The prophet had an unmistakable warrant for the fullest assurance of his sins being put away, and of standing in the favour and blessing of God.

This assurance was based on two things — the application of the live coal from off the altar, and the word of the Lord. By the altar we are to understand a place where the sacrifice was burnt and presented to God. The cross of Christ is the only altar of New Testament days, and the various altars of the Old Testament were only types of it; and the coals of fire which consumed the sacrifices, and caused their savour to ascend to God, were figurative of that condemnation of sin which fell on Jesus, when He was made sin and a curse for us upon the cross of Calvary. The application, therefore, of the

live coal (Isa. 6:6)

to the prophet’s

unclean lips (Isa. 6:7)

teaches us that God has, in His grace, provided an all-cleansing remedy for sin; that that remedy is found only in the sufferings, blood-shedding, and death of the Son of God; and that the moment the sin-burdened conscience realizes the virtue of that blood, the soul is at once at peace with God. It is the blood of Christ which maketh atonement. It is the blood of Christ which has made peace between the sinner and God. It is

in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:13)

and

through His blood (Eph. 1:7)

that the far-off sinner is brought nigh to God. It is the blood of Christ alone which cleanseth from all sin. It is only by the blood of Christ that any person has peace and confidence in God’s presence.

The prophet knew that his uncleanness was purged by the application of the live coal from off the altar; and the sinner that believes in Christ Jesus for salvation knows also that he has peace through the blood of the cross. But the prophet had also the word of the Lord to assure him of his pardon and acceptance; and, blessed be God, so have we. Some will try to persuade us that no one can know his sins forgiven till after death, and therefore it is great presumption for any one to say so. But I reply, Who says I am forgiven? God says so; and if God says,

Thy sins are forgiven thee (Luke 5:20),

why need I fear, even if the whole world says it is not so? He tells us that Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and that my sins are forgiven, if I believe on the Lord Jesus; for

to Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

Let God then be true; for He who said to the prophet,

Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isa. 6:7),

says also now to me, and to all that believe on the Lord Jesus,

Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee (Matt. 9:2).

We wait not for dreams, or visions, or some miraculous actings upon the senses; but we rest on the precious blood of Christ, and are assured by the unalterable word of the Lord that our sins are forgiven.

But there are some who, though they do not deny the present knowledge of forgiveness of sins, yet often hesitate to confess that they are saved. They forget that the object of Christ's incarnation and death was to SAVE, that He came to SAVE the lost — not to help, but to save — every one that believeth on Him. Hence He told the weeping woman at His feet,

Thy faith hath SAVED thee (Luke 7:50)!

And when Zacchæus received Him joyfully, Jesus said,

This day is SALVATION come to this house (Luke 19:9).

The work of Christ saves, and the word of Christ says, You are saved by faith!

"But shall I after all be in glory?" exclaim some of the uninstructed and feeble-minded of the household of faith. "Though I now rest in Christ, and am at peace with God, may I not after all be lost?" No, no, dear child of God; for the blood of Christ that speaks before the throne on my behalf now, will speak there for thee for ever; and Christ, who is thy righteousness now, will be thy righteousness for ever; and the Holy Spirit, who dwells in thee now, though grieved and quenched, will dwell in thee for ever; and Christ, who pleads for thee in heaven now, will continually intercede for thee. Jesus hath thee securely, and will never let thee go: none shall pluck thee out of His hand; for thus saith the word of the Lord,

He is able to save them to the uttermost (i.e. right on to the end) that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).

4. HIS WILLING OBEDIENCE. Some may say, You should preach Christian duty. So say I, only put it in its right place. Jesus said,

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15);

for He loves the

willing heart (Ex. 35:5),

and the

cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

When we know peace with God, through the amazing sacrifice of His beloved Son, it constrains us to love and serve Him to whom we owe so much. And we see the prophet was much in this spirit; for after he had received an unmistakable assurance of pardon and peace with God, he had a willing, grateful desire to addict himself to the Lord's service. He says,

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:8).

This surely is willing service, happy duty; it is like taking the yoke of Jesus, whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light. The wondrous love of Christ constrains us to love Him, who has so loved us; it calls upon us to praise and glorify Him, who has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Dear reader! let me affectionately ask if you have solemnly considered how matters stand between you and God? Does He now behold you as at peace with Him? Are you sure that God says of you, as He did of the prophet,

Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged (Isa. 6:7)?

This is the ground of peace with God — peace through the blood of Jesus — peace in the confidence that your sins were transferred to Jesus, and borne by Him, and that you are made the righteousness of God in Him.

Oh, my reader, if you feel the burden of your sins, and have not peace, come to Jesus at once, just as you are!

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 4 (1856), "All Flesh Is Grass."

Isa. 40:8.

THE earliest testimony in Scripture to the character of "flesh," is from God Himself before the Flood. "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." (Gen. 6:3.) Thus early was announced that truth, which the subsequent dispensations of God have so remarkably corroborated, that whether God addresses the understanding or conscience of man, his fears, or his affections, striving to bring him back unto Himself, from whom he has revolted, it is all useless. He is "flesh," and flesh is antagonistic to God. This God announced, and on this ground doomed it to judgment, after a respite of an hundred and twenty years.

At the close of this period of the longsuffering of God, the judgment is executed on all flesh, with the exception of a spared remnant of eight persons. A new era commences; but is "flesh" altered in its relation to God? is it improved by judgment? No; all flesh speedily falls into idolatry; but in the patience and longsuffering of God, instead of bringing another judgment upon the world of the ungodly, He calls out one person "alone" (Isa. 51:2), and blesses him, revealing Himself to him as "God Almighty," and making him the depositary of most gracious promises. In process of time, it pleased God to make the posterity of Abraham a nation peculiar to Himself, for the special purpose of

maintaining the truth amidst “the gods many, and lords many,” that Jehovah their God was the one only true God. In order to this, God Himself had delivered them out of Egyptian bondage, cast out the nations of Canaan before them, and gave them laws for their government, and ordinances of worship, that the blessedness of the people which had Jehovah for their God might be made manifest to all other nations. But this highly favored nation, after but a brief possession of the land of Canaan, instead of faithfully witnessing to the One Jehovah, copied the manners and worship of the nations whom God had cast out before them, and fell into idolatry. Many indeed were the strivings of God with them to reclaim them; the severity of servitude, the mercy of deliverance, their own experience that it went well with them when they served Jehovah, and brought misery on themselves when they departed from Him. But all these things failed to win this highly favored portion of man to God. He was flesh, and every fresh striving of God with him, only tended to bring more strongly out that flesh was incorrigible. This was remarkably shown by “the ministry of the prophets,” whom God raised up from time to time. “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man, or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; He gave them all into his hand.” (2 Chron. 36:16, 17.) The prophetic ministry brought out from “the ungodly nation” a remnant, which feared the Lord, and received His gracious promises. The prophets were as “God’s month,” to “take forth the precious from the vile,” and to lead those who were separated unto God by their ministry, to put no confidence in themselves, but to trust in the living God.” “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.” (Jer. 17:5.)

The prophet Isaiah testifies against the nation of Israel, but comforts an elect remnant, the” little one that becomes a thousand, and the small one that becomes a strong nation. “The Book of the Prophet Isaiah may be divided into three parts. First, chapters 1-35; then, what may be called the historical episode, 36-39; and then, the truly evangelical strain, 40 to the end. In the first division, how have our hearts delighted to linger over the blessed strain of the birth and acting’s of Immanuel comprised in chap. 7-12. Then there is the doom of Babylon, and of sundry nations, interspersed with the deliverance and joy of the oppressed remnant, till we come to the glowing strain of millennial blessedness. (ch. 35) What a triumphant close! But we are turned to other things, and learn the evil height of rebellion and blasphemy, to which “flesh” has reached in the person of Sennacherib. In him we have flesh unrestrained, showing its willful “rage” against God and His people; taking the proud place of an equal with God, instead of the place of a creature entirely dependent on His will. The righteous judgment of God falls upon him and his followers, in their full rampancy of rebellion against God-true picture of the yet future manifestation of unbridled flesh in the Beast and his armies, met with direct judgment by the wrath of the Lamb. (Isa. 36, 37; Rev. 19) “The flesh” in the saint is restrained, but is it therefore better in itself? Let the restraint be removed, and the flesh in the saint instantly shows itself in exaltation against God. This is plainly manifested in the history of Hezekiah, recorded Isaiah 38, 39. “Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that A. might know all that was in his heart.” (2 Chron. 32:31.)

It is after this manifestation of the evil of the flesh in the open rebel and in the saint, that the prophet commences that most blessed strain, “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people.” But what is the ground of the comfort? it is that God is acting in the richest grace, after the evil of the flesh has been fully demonstrated. It is not now as He had announced before the flood, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he is flesh,” but, after respite, judgment. This still holds true. But on the ground of what “flesh” is, and has been proved to be, God now announces the most solid comfort. Let the “cry” go forth to the ends of the earth, “All flesh is grass.” It is no longer a question to be proved, but one already settled, and to be received as an axiom. The prophet raises the cry, in connection with the revelation of the glory of the Lord. Let that shine forth, and “flesh” must needs wither up before it. And the cry itself, “All flesh is grass,” is contrasted with “The word of our God shall stand forever.” “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever.” (Isa. 40:6-8.)

John the Baptist identifies himself with this “voice,” and makes “the cry” his own. If he be sent before the Lord to prepare His way, his “cry” is, “All flesh is grass.” Flesh must not show itself. It cannot stand in the presence of the Lord. Religious flesh, Scribes and Pharisees, must flee from the wrath to come. The language of the Evangelist differs from that of the Prophet in one particular. In Isaiah it is written, “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” In the Evangelist, “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”1 His glory is His salvation, blessed be His name; that glory which, on its manifestation, shall blow upon all flesh, is now testified to by the word of God as His salvation, to all who truly acknowledge the utter worthlessness of the flesh. John specially went “before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins.” (Luke 1:76, 77.) But the same John who cried, “All flesh is grass,” had another “cry” of the most opposite character. “John bare witness of Him, and cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake. He that cometh after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.” And when John sees Jesus coming unto him, he says, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He, of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me; for He was before me.” Ha is not grass. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” And He is declared to be this in His person and His work, that there might be solid comfort in Him, and from Him, to those who know that “All flesh is grass.” It is upon this ground that salvation is of grace through faith in Jesus, the Son of God and Lamb of God. It is indeed “an hard saying,” “who can hear it?” that “All flesh is grass.” And a large portion of the trials of saints arises from disappointed expectations of the flesh, either in themselves, or in others. It was “a hard saying” for the disciples to hear Jesus presenting Himself to them as “living bread,” “meat,” and “drink,” with the solemn declaration, “Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.” (John 6:53.) They had not then realized that “All flesh is grass.” Its thoughts, judgments, feelings, alike fretted against the doctrine of the cross, as thus propounded by the Lord. But the Lord closes this wonderful discourse concerning His own person and His work on the cross by confirming the cry of the Prophet and of the Baptist as to what “flesh” really is. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.” (John 6:63.) The true doctrine of the cross, and the profit lessness of the flesh must stand together if the flesh, intellectually, morally, or religiously, “profiteth” in bringing man unto God, “then Christ has died in vain.” If the flesh profiteth to the understanding the things of God, then is there no need that a man should be born again. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” How much inward conflict there is, in “casting down reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;” let each saint answer for himself. It is indeed a hard saying, that “the flesh profiteth nothing;” but what deliverance, what peace, what comfort, pervade the soul, when all expectation from the flesh is given up, and we learn to glory only in the Lord.

The apostle Peter takes up the cry of the prophet, confirming it, and connecting his own testimony with it, blessedly enlarging the scope of the declaration, “The word of the Lord endureth for ever.” “Seeing ye hare purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is Me word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” (1 Pet. 1:22, 28.) If the prophet testified, “the word of our God shall stand forever;” the apostle adds, “it liveth and abideth forever.” There was life in the word, when conveyed to the heart by the Spirit, and that word was by the gospel preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. It was not only the word of God in its enduringness set in strong contrast with flesh in its transistorizes, but it is Jesus in the glory of His person, in His cross, in His resurrection, in His ascension into heaven, “angels, and principalities, and powers, being made subject unto Him,” who is in the gospel set in strong contrast with all that man is or can be. He abideth forever, and whatever man covets, whether righteousness, wisdom, or strength, or even life, is only found abidingly in Him.

But although the preaching of the gospel proceeds forth from God to man on the ground that “All flesh is grass,” it finds men, in their individual thoughts, and in their associations together, still trying to contradict the axiom, that “All flesh is grass.” The very “goodness of God,” as proclaimed in the gospel, is taken occasion of by man, as an opportunity for exalting himself. And if the confession be extorted from man, by the stern fact of the uncertainty of life, that a man is a poor frail being—in a word, that he is “grass”—still “the glory of man” is regarded by him as something more permanent than himself. But what says our oracle? “All the glory of man is as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.” The glory of man, on which he prides himself as that which survives him, is here presented as even more perishable than grass. When the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be actually revealed, then will all human glory not only be obscured, but also will be righteously judged by God, as being set up in opposition to Christ.” How can ye believe, says Jesus, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?” There is no abidingness in human glory, it is “as the flower of the field;” but the glory of Christ in the salvation of a sinner abideth forever. That which the word preached by the gospel now testifies unto, the day of the Lord will clearly manifest. (Isa. 2:17.)

There are many restraints on the flesh now; for example, civil government, and the preaching of the gospel. Civil government is hardly regarded as an ordinance of God, but rather as an institution for the convenience of man. Neither is the preaching of the gospel regarded as God’s grand ordinance, but it is rather superseded by an extended profession of the Christian religion, which has not sprung from the gospel at all. The effort of man is to throw off every restraint. “Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?” is virtually the language of the day. But what if God should again no longer “strive with man!” what if He allow the restraints of government to be relaxed according to man’s willfulness! what if the testimony to the gospel of His grace be closed! what if God Himself, restraining man’s willfulness by so many secret means, should, in righteous judgment, send on man a strong delusion to believe a lie! It is to this that man is now tending. “The wicked or lawless one” shall be revealed, and the full energy of “the flesh” will then be displayed in blasphemy against God and His Christ, to be met with direct judgment from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

What a safeguard therefore is it to know that “All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of the grass”—that judgment is its necessary doom, for the flesh, and “the minding the things of the flesh,” is enmity against God—that the gospel preached is the judgment of the flesh already in the cross of Christ. “Our old man is crucified with Him.” And whosoever acquiesces in that judgment passed by God there, shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life. He becomes “armed with the same mind,” gives up all expectation from the flesh, because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. And to him the cry, that “All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass,” is the basis of the most solid comfort, because he is led to expect nothing from it, but his expectation is from the Lord. “Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:13, 14.)

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