

PRAYER.

"I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE" (LUKE XXII. 32.)

Faint not, weary pilgrim, Faint not by the way, Listen to thy Saviour, What doth Jesus say? Ever as the day is, So thy strength shall be; Let not courage fail thee, I have prayed for thee."

What tho' sore temptations Meet you in the way, Fear not, humble Christian, Drive your fears away, In thy tribulations, Look to Calvary; Hear your dying Saviour Praying still for thee.

Though the raging tempter, Seeking for his prey, Tries to turn your footsteps From the narrow way; If you firm resist him, He will from you flee; Fear not you will conquer, Jesus prays for thee.

What though friends forsake you, Earthly comforts fall, Cast your care on Jesus, Let not fears prevail, See your loving Saviour Suff'ring on the tree, Bleeding, groaning, dying, Praying still for thee.

What though you may meet with Trials in the way, Lean upon your Saviour, He will be your stay, Onward press with courage, Feeble though you be, Never be disheartened— "I have prayed for thee."

How these words of comfort Heavenly joy impart! May they be forever Stamped upon my heart, Blessed consolation, Naught so sweet can be As the words of Jesus— "I have prayed for thee."

Visitor Dupitt.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

A NEW SERMON BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it: neither shall they visit it: neither shall that be done any more."—JEREMIAH 3:16.

This text speaks concerning the material ark. I should like to append to that another, which speaks of the ark spiritually, and tells us where its antitype is to be found.

"And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament (or covenant)."—REV. 11:19.

When inward piety is low the externals of religion are frequently cried up. Those who know nothing of God are the very people to exclaim concerning themselves and their brethren, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these." The Pharisees, who were furthest from God, were the most bitter advocates of ritualism and formalism; they would not even have a man healed on the Sabbath day, or allow the hungry to rub a few ears of corn out of the husks. It is not always so; but yet too often, "The nearer the church the further from God." The more gown, the less grace. The more phylactery, the less sanctity. The more of ecclesiasticism, the less of true godliness. On the other hand whenever the Spirit of God is largely poured out, although the ordinances of God are carefully attended to, yet as external things are sure to be put into their proper place, and that proper place is a secondary one.

The spiritual is put foremost and the ritualistic is placed hindmost when grace is largely given. It was so with David in the fifty-first Psalm; when he had made a hearty confession of his sin, and cried to God for mercy, he uttered these memorable words, "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offerings." He puts aside the symbol because he has a clearer view of the substance. That is exactly the case with the people mentioned in my text: they had been sadly sinful; but God in His mercy promised to turn to them, and to bless them, and bring them back into their own land again, and he says—"And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more." The visible golden ark which was so much their glory, should be quite forgotten, because of the gracious visitation of God. That shall be subject this morning.

First, I shall invite your attention to the symbol revered; secondly we shall see that reverence obliterated; and, thirdly, we shall dwell upon that reverence transferred; for though we no longer revere the ancient ark of shittim wood overlaid with pure gold, we do honor to that ark enduring a ark of which we

read in our second text—"the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of his covenant."

THE SYMBOL REVERENCED.

The ark of the covenant was a small coffer not exceeding four feet and a half in length by about two feet eight inches in breadth. It was made of an enduring kind of wood, and was covered with pure gold both within and without. Upon the upper part of it was a golden crown, into which fitted a solid slab of gold, which formed the lid of the ark. That golden lid was called the propitiatory or mercy-seat; in the Hebrew, *Kapporeth*, or a place of covering. Upon the two ends of this mercy-seat, and part and parcel of the same solid metal, were two cherubs, with outstretched wings. The Lord said of them, "And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high covering the mercy-seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be." Between those wings, when God was favorable to His people, the bright light, called the Shekinah, was wont to shine forth; and when, once in the year, the high priest went into the innermost place, bearing with him a cloud of incense and sprinkling the blood, he saw the glory of that light.

This ark was the object of great reverence, and very fully so, because it symbolized God's presence, the presence of Jehovah, the living God, in the midst of His people. To no other people had God given such a token of His presence. He walked in the midst of no other camp; but of Israel He had said, "My Spirit shall go with thee." It was the first article of the tabernacle concerning which Moses received instructions, for, indeed, it was the first in honor. Read the twenty-fifth chapter of Exodus, and see how speedily the Lord who gave the law provided a chest for its honorable preservation. Although Solomon made most of the furniture of the holy place anew he retained the same ark, which was too much esteemed to be changed. When it was carried abroad in the marchings of the Israelites it always went in front, and it was distinguished from all the other furniture by being covered externally with blue, as if to signify its heavenly character. Lifted high on men's shoulders, upon golden staves, the blue colored wrapping of the ark was seen in the van of the Lord's host occupying the place of honor. We do not wonder therefore that it was much spoken of and esteemed by the tribes of Israel.

IT WAS THEIR LEADER.

When the time came to march the ark went in the forefront. How often did Moses cry, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered," and on they went across the pathless desert rightly led by this ark of the covenant. When they came to the brink of Jordan, as soon as the feet of the priests that bare the ark touched the waters, the river was parted, and they went through dry shod. It was so trusted in that they bore the ark on one occasion into the battlefield, when God was not with them, and the golden coffer was carried into captivity to vindicate its own honor among the Philistines, by smiting its captors with sore diseases, and breaking in pieces Dagon, their god.

A wonderful ark it was when God was with it. It was such a symbol of power that we wonder not that when David brought it up to Mount Zion all the people shouted, and with sound of trumpet celebrated its triumphal march. It was also such a symbol of holiness that Solomon removed Pharaoh's daughter out of the city of David, for he said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, King of Israel, because the places are holy, wherunto the ark of the Lord hath come."

In Solomon's day the ark was finally installed in the temple, and the king placed over it two greater cherubim, ten cubits high, with outstretched wings. These were made of olive wood overlaid with gold, and probably covered the entire structure of the coffer and the smaller cherubim, which were component parts of it. Then they drew out the staves of the ark, signifying that there the ark was to stay; but they left the ends of the staves visible, to show that God might yet depart from them if they sinned against Him. In the temple the ark rested until the time of the captivity, and from that time it was no more heard of, and possibly never appeared again in the temple that was built by Zerubbabel or in that which was enlarged and beautified by Herod.

The ark was to Israelites, after their wanderings were over, the fixed centre of their nationality, even as while they were in the wilderness it had always been placed in the centre of the camp. In the desert it had been the central kernel of the whole army. Outside the ark was the tabernacle or holy place, and out-

side of that, in various rows and orders, were the tents of the tribes; but the core of it all was this honored ark. To-day we have a centre to which we rally, a fixed centre which faith perceives in heaven, whither the true ark of the covenant has gone up.

Marvel not that the men of Judah paid great reverence to this ark when in so many ways it was a token for good to them. What they did to this ark is mentioned in the text. First they recognized it as the ark of the covenant of the Lord. They were wont to say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." They spoke much of it, and prided themselves upon the possession of it. Nay they not only spoke of it, but

THEY LOVED IT;

for we read, "Neither shall it come to mind," or as the margin has it, "Neither shall it come upon the heart." The ark of the covenant was upon the hearts of God's people; they had a deep affection for it. When it was carried away captive we read that the aged Eli fell backward with horror at the tidings. It was very dear to the people of God, and if it was taken away they reckoned that the glory was departed from them.

Hence in the next place, they remembered it, as the text plainly informs us. If they were captives they prayed in the direction in which the ark was situated; wherever they wandered they thought of God and of the coffer which represented His presence.

Next, they visited it. On certain holy days they came from Dan and from Beersheba, even from the utmost ends of their land, in joyful companies, singing from stage to stage, and making joyful holiday as they went up to the place where God did dwell between the cherubim. When they came back they rejoiced because they had worshipped before the ark of the covenant, even before the presence of the Most High God.

Visiting it, they were accustomed also to speak, highly of it; for in the margin of your Bibles you will find, "Neither shall they magnify it any more." They used to tell one another what the ark had done; the glory that shone forth from it, the acceptance of the offering whose blood was sprinkled upon it on the Day of Atonement, and the testimony which was heard from between the cherubic wings.

REVERENCE OBLITERATED.

They were to say no more, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." Yet that fact was to be a blessing. Observe that the words are not spoken as a threatening, but as a gracious promise. Now, this cannot merely mean that they would be without the ark; for they would certainly understand that to be a sign of divine anger. Neither would the mere absence of the ark fulfil the prophets' words; for if the ark were gone they would remember it still, and their hearts would hanker after it. If they could not visit it, yet it would come to their minds and they would speak of it.

It was somehow to be a boon to them that they should speak no more of the ark of the covenant, for the text was delivered in the form of a promise. The fact is they were to have done with the symbol because the substance would come. They were no more to speak of the ark itself, because they would have that which the ark was intended to foreshadow. Bear with me with great patience this morning while I try to interest you in the points in which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ is the ark of covenant now in the temple of God for us.

Our Lord Jesus by His coming has put out of his people's thoughts the material ark of the covenant, because its meaning is fulfilled in Him; and this, first, in the sense of perservation. The ark was intended to be a sacred treasury in which God laid up the two tables of stone upon which the law was written, that they might be kept there as priceless things, not to be commonly handled or even seen, but shut up there as the most precious gifts of heaven. We know it where the tablets are now, and we know not what has become of the golden chest; but where is the law now? Once it lay broken at your feet and mine, even as the tables were shattered at the feet of Moses.

The law apart from Christ is a terror to our guilty souls, because it is a law broken, and therefore condemning; but the law in Christ Jesus, honored and fulfilled by Him, is a delightful sight to true worshippers. In Him the law is more honored than in any merely human obedience, and it smiles upon us as if we had perfectly obeyed it. It was not within his heart alone, but within all His life; His whole thoughts, words, and actions went to make up a golden chest in which the precious treasure of the perfect law of God should be contained. O come, let us magnify His blessed name!

Next, the ark signifies propitiatory; for over the top of the sacred

which held the two tables of the law was the slab of gold called

THE MERCY-SEAT

which covered all. We will not talk of that golden covering now, but we will speak of Jesus, our blessed Lord who covers all. When God looks down upon His law; he does not see it nakedly, but He beholds it in the person of His Son. He sees it there perfectly preserved without taint of flaw of any kind, and He rejoices therein. "Ah," said the Jew, "we have a mercy-seat that covers all." "Ah," say we, "but we have one who does not do that typically, and in outward pattern alone, but He is the real covering upon which we lay our prayers and thanksgivings, and find ourselves accepted." We come not to God on the footing of the law; but the interposing propitiation covers all, and comes between, and upon that mercy-seat we offer our petitions and praises.

The next word is a very blessed one, and that is covenant. The ark was called "the ark of the covenant." It represented a covenant of works, as it was a part of a visible sanctuary; and, ah, how soon was that covenant broken! There is no wonder that in the breaking of that covenant the golden pot of manna was lost, and that Aaron's rod that budded was no more seen; for we are told in the Chronicles that when they opened the ark, in the days of Solomon, there was nothing found in it "save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt." Paul tells us that they were there originally, and so it is probable that they were taken away by the Philistines.

Ah, how soon we should lose the sweet things of God if we were under the covenant of works, and how soon we should miss the gentle sovereignty of His shepherd rod! I thank and bless God that in Christ Jesus we have a covenant of grace which can never fail, and never can be broken, and in Him we have all that our souls desire: pot of manna and rod of Aaron, covenant provision and covenant rule we find in Him. Oh, how I wish some of the people of God understood it, and realized that there is established between God and us in the person of Christ Jesus a covenant ordered in all things and sure. May the Holy Ghost teach you this. God has pledged His honor for the salvation of His people, and He has sealed the covenant with the precious blood of Jesus, and therefore He will not turn away from it, but will keep it for His Son's sake. Oh, blessed Jesus, we want no ark of the covenant; for Thou art the covenant itself to us, and in Thee we rejoice.

We have only reached the middle of the subject now; this ark also signified enthronement; for the top of the ark was, so to speak, the throne of God. It was "the throne of the heavenly grace." There God reigned and dwelt; that is, typically. It was a throne to which petitioners came with their pleas to obtain favors at the hand of the great King. Where now is the visible throne of God? Ah, sirs, his holy place has been broken down, and he dwelleth not in temples made with hands, that is to say of this building. There is no visible throne of God upon the face of the earth now.

If you would see the throne of God, behold the person of Christ; for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The Lord reigneth from the tree, from the cross; here is the kingdom of God set up in the person of Jesus Christ among the sons of men. Oh what a blessing to have such a throne to come to—to Jesus himself, who is the throne of the invisible God! We talk no longer of the ark, and of its gold, and of its crown, and of its golden lid, and of the winged cherubs; for the Lord Jesus is infinitely better than these. Oh, our beloved Lord and Master, thou dost chase away these shadows from our minds, for the very throne of God art thou!

Out of this grows the next idea, that as it was the place of God's enthronement, so it was

THE DOOR OF MAN'S APPROACH.

Men never came nearer to God on earth typically than when they stood in the holy place close by the ark. Israel was nearest to God symbolically on the day when the atonement had been made and accepted, and her priest stood before the ark awestricken in the presence of God. You and I need not speak of the ark of the covenant; for we have a blessed way of approach. We do not come to Christ once in the year only, but every day in the year, and every hour of the day. He who came but once in the year came tremblingly. The Jews had a tradition that they put a cord about the foot of the High Priest, so that if he should die before the ark they might draw out his corpse; such was their servile fear of God. The tradition shows what was the trembling nature of that entrance within the veil; how different from the apostle's words, "Let us come boldly unto the throne of the

heavenly grace." We are not afraid of being stricken with death there; we are full of reverence, but we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.

There is no approaching God except in Christ; but in Christ our approach to God may be as near as possible. Come nearer, nearer still; it is your fault that you do not come near enough. There is nothing to tremble at there—of the right up to God and speak with him as a man speaketh with his friend. We come boldly because we come through Jesus. Who is afraid of Jesus? Who shudders when drawing near to him? And if he be the mercy-seat to which we come, and the place where the Father meets us, we feel that he permits the holy familiarity, the humble freedom, which is suggested to our hearts by the spirit of adoption.

I must go a step further—the ark was the place of gracious power. On the top of the mercy-seat stood cherubic figures, and notwithstanding all that learned men may have said, I do not think that any idea is nearer the mark than that these cherubims were types of angelic power, and of all the powers of providence which God is pleased to use in behalf of his people. Notice how frequently the Word associates angels with our Lord; for instance, when Jacob saw the ladder which reached to heaven, and God at the top of it, there were angels ascending and descending upon it. Cherubim were on all the curtains of the most holy place which enclosed the ark, and the ministry of angels is interwoven into the great covenant plan of salvation. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. Consider, then, that the angels on the mercy-seat typify the power of God by which he will defend his people.

Every angel is the servant of our covenant Head, and so the guardian of every member of Christ. As he might have summoned twelve legions of angels by one uplifted glance to heaven, so will he fill the mountain with horses of fire and chariots of fire whenever his people need such succor. The stars in their courses fight for the Saviour and for the saved ones; nothing shall by any means harm them. In heaven, and earth, and hell, the warrant of the great King stands in full force, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," and this protection comes to us because we are preserved in Jesus Christ.

THE REAL MERCY-SEAT.

Oh, that I know how to speak words worthy to lie under the soles of my Master's feet! Oh, that I could speak a sentence that was fit to be laid in the road like the palms branches, with which the disciples strewed his way, not worthy to be touched by his feet, but by the feet of the beast that he rode upon! I am not worthy to unloose his shoe latchet. He is so glorious that archangels fall on their face to adore him. Heaven is splendid, but the splendor of heaven is the presence of my Lord and Master. His throne is a glorious, high throne, but it owes its glory and its height to him that sits upon it. Hallelujah unto thee, O Christ. Hallelujah for ever and ever! for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood!

If the Jew was ever permitted to look upon the golden chest of the ark, he saw but little compared with what I see in thee, thou man, thou God! The wood that could not rot, covered over with precious gold, was a poor representation of his perfect manhood and glorious Godhead. The ark was crowned, but we see Jesus made a little lower than the angels, and crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. Again my heart cries hallelujah!

The Jew could but see a slab of gold that was called the throne of God, but we see the spotless, perfect life, and infinitely precious atonement of Christ, which are better than the much fine gold. I see God, not as a light for the eyes, but as shining upon the soul in Jesus my Lord. Oh, the glory, the glory of that light! I am reconciled! I am a child of God! I am brought near! Jehovah speaks to me! I speak to Him! Hallelujah! All praise to Him through whom such fellowship is rendered possible, so that a man can see God and live! Glory, glory be unto him who is new in the temple above. The veil is rent, and faith can see Jesus, to whom we come this day. God bless you, beloved. Amen.

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