

# Seven Sermons

On The  
**Character of Gideon**

Preached At  
**The Temple Church, Bristol;**

And At The  
**Octagon Chapel, Bath.**

By The  
Rev. Fountain Elwin,

Vicar of Temple,  
And one of the ministers of The Octagon

London:  
J. Hatchard and Son, 187, Piccadilly  
1841

# SERMON I. GIDEON'S INTERVIEW WITH THE ANGEL.

Judges vi. 11-16.

*And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us, and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.*

No method of preaching, I believe, has been found more instructive and edifying than that which brings before a congregation historical facts, remarkable transactions, and the various characters of those who were engaged in them, as set forth in the holy Scriptures. They answer the purpose of leading our minds to the contemplation of the higher matters of doctrine, by a reference to practice. They hold out warning in some cases, and encouragement in others; and show how God will deal with us in our earthly pilgrimage, by telling us how he has dealt with others in past ages. With this view, it is my intention to deliver a course of sermons on the history and character of Gideon.

Amongst the various important lessons which the history of Israel sets before us, none are more plainly marked than this, viz. "Sin carries its own punishment." In the first verse of this chapter we read thus: " And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord;" that was the sin: "And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian;" that was the punishment. It is remarkable how completely this punishment was the execution of a former threat, which you will find in Leviticus xxvi., viz. that if they would not hearken to the commandments of the Lord, "he would bring terror on them, and sorrow of heart; that they should sow their seed in vain, for their enemies should eat it; and that they which hated them should reign over them." In some verses of this chapter, immediately preceding the text, we see the literal fulfilment of these denunciations of the divine wrath: "Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made themselves dens in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and destroyed the increase of the earth, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass."

Seven years did this bondage and misery continue. In all that time we do not hear one cry of repentance, nor see one act of faith in the true God, on the part of Israel. They hardened their heart under the sore affliction, and stiffened their neck under the galling yoke. Their sustenance was gone, their enemies held them in cruel subjection, and yet the cause of all the calamity was fostered and maintained; Israel worshipped *Baal* instead of *Jehovah*. O how hard the heart becomes when it is in Satan's keeping! How seared, as with a hot iron, when restraining grace is withdrawn, and when the Holy Ghost is grieved! Israel seem to have tried every expedient before they would go to the God of mercy, and ask pardon. But at last, being convinced that no other means would bring relief, that no other method would answer, "They cried unto the Lord." In all probability they had cried before to *Baal*, and had shouted, "O Baal, hear us!" but " there was no voice, nor any that answered;" so that, finding no help from the idol, they were compelled to cry unto the Lord. As the first verse of this chapter connects the sin with the punishment, so the seventh verse connects the prayer with the answer: "It came to pass, when Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet." He might have said, by the

voice of that prophet, " It is now too late to cry for deliverance. The door of mercy has been standing *open* during the seven years of your captivity, and ye *would not* enter; now it is *shut*, and ye *cannot*." But Israel's God was a God "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of great goodness." His long-suffering waited during the six years; and when the seventh year came, which we, if we had witnessed its approach, should have thought the "year of vengeance," the year for which God had been waiting as the period when the measure of the iniquity of Israel would be filled up, he let them alone that year also; and when at length those wretched backsliding people did cry unto him, he instantly heard their cry and helped them: "It came to pass, that when Israel cried to the Lord because of the Midianites, the Lord sent them a *prophet*," as a token that he would still hold communication with them; and then he sent a *deliverer* to intimate, that "though he had visited their sin with a rod, and their iniquity with scourges, yet his loving-kindness he had not utterly taken away, nor suffered his truth to fail." And now, beloved brethren, whose history is this? Is it the history of the perverse and rebellious Israelites only? No, it is your history and mine. It is the history of that sin-distressed soul who is now perhaps weeping to hear it told. "Yes," says the penitent man, " it is the account of my past life: I served other gods, I went astray, I did very wickedly, year after year; I hardened myself even against his chastening hand, and kicked against the pricks; and it was of his mercy that I was not then consumed. But he let me alone, one year after another; till at length, having tried every expedient to satisfy conscience without repentance, and to be happy without real peace, and to walk in the way of my heart and in the sight of my eyes, trusting that it should yet be well with me at last, I began to think that for all these things God would bring me into judgment; I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me. He might have frowned me from his presence; he might have upbraided me for my long rebellion; but, like the tender father of the prodigal son, he welcomed me back, and gave me to understand the mercy which is contained in that declaration, ' There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.'"

Before we comment upon the circumstance which is recorded in the text, we will consider the character of him *by whom* this message

came, and the character of him *to whom* it came; in other words, the angel's character, and that of Gideon.

Who was this angel? Bishop Patrick well observes, that " from such places as this, the ancient Christians rightly gathered that *the Son of God* appeared, on some great occasions, in old time ;" and he adds, "This is not incredible, but a matter of easy belief, if we be persuaded that he really did appear in our own flesh, which he took of the Virgin Mary, and dwelt among us a long time, and then ascended in it to heaven, where he lives for ever. For why should we think it strange, if for a short time he appeared sometimes in human flesh, as a prelude to what he intended in the fulness of time?"

It was indeed a greater thing which he did for us at last: but he that did the greater, may well be granted to have done the less; and there is no reason to doubt of it." Let me observe, that we rob ourselves of a great portion of the comfort of God's word, by not discerning the Saviour wherever he is revealed. Many persons read the Bible as if no revelation of the Messiah was to be met with, till the Gospel of St. Matthew tells them it is " the book of the generation of Jesus Christ." But the eye of faith sees that " angel of the covenant" afar off, under the Old Testament dispensation, as well as under the new. Does it not stamp a value, an importance, a preciousness, upon such passages as these in the Old Testament, to see in them, not a created angel bearing a message from Jehovah, but Jehovah Jesus making him self known to his people in human shape; so that, on some occasions, they had not only the type of the Saviour in their sacrifices, but the Saviour himself before their bodily eyes; that even then "his delights were with the sons of men," in those anticipations of the great errand of mercy which he undertook, in the fulness of time, for us men and for our salvation? Take this comforting view of the Messiah, and you will read as with new eyes many parts of God's word. How remarkable, for instance, is the language addressed by the Lord to Moses, when he was conducting Israel through the wilderness to Canaan! I quote it in order to throw light on the subject before us. "Behold, I send my angel before thee; and he shall keep thee in the way in which thou goest, and bring thee to the place which I have prepared for thee.

Beware of him, and obey his voice. Provoke him not, for my name is in him."

We can entertain no doubt that it was *this* angel, even "the angel of the covenant," the second person in the everblessed Trinity, that appeared thus to Gideon. You will observe that he speaks in the *first person*; not as one delivering a message from another; not as the prophet mentioned in the eighth verse. He speaks as God; he does not say, "Thus saith the Lord," but "Go in this thy might; have not / sent thee?" And the words which precede his charge to Gideon are strong in confirmation of this supposition: *The Lord* looked upon him, and said, "Go in this thy might." He did indeed speak words of meaning when he said, "The Lord is with thee;" for when Gideon stood before this "angel of the Lord," he stood before the Lord of angels, before Jehovah Jesus; and he might have said to Gideon what, afterwards, "in the days of his flesh," he said to the blind man whom he had restored to sight, and who asked, "Where is the Son of God, that I might worship him?" Jesus said, "I that speak unto thee am he."

But when God had heard the cry of penitent Israel, and had determined to come down to deliver them, what were the means taken for this purpose? *To whom* does he vouchsafe to discover his design? Who is the favoured person that shall receive the gracious communication? It is a national concern: shall not the chief men of the nation receive the first intimation of it? It is a matter of general importance: shall not immediate publicity be given to it? No, the Lord's way is not as ours; he is pleased to do it in a manner which shall show that he can raise up any instrument, and work by any means, in order that the pride of man may be abased, and the loftiness of man brought low; that the glory of the deliverance may be all his own, and that he alone may be exalted. And therefore, instead of the sound of a trumpet throughout Israel to proclaim these glad tidings to the nation, instead of a revelation to the princes and nobles of the land, God will do it in a private way. He comes to a poor humble individual; and the beginning of the mighty work which he was about to perform is told us in these simple words: "There came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak that was in Ophrah." God is a God of sovereignty, and giveth none account of

his matters. When he saw Israel's sufferings under the Egyptian yoke, he communicated his purpose in the same manner: he appeared to Moses as he was feeding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. Pass from these instances of temporal deliverance to that great deliverance, the redemption of a lost world. To whom did the message of that deliverance come? Not to Herod, though he was king upon the throne; not to the great and noble that were about him; but it came to pass, that "there were certain shepherds in that country keeping watch over their flocks by night; and the angel of the Lord appeared unto *them*, and the glory of the Lord overshadowed them, and the glad tidings for all nations came to them, saying, "There is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

And with regard to his choice of *instruments* for his work, how sovereign is God! When a king was to be appointed to rule over his people Israel, how was that appointment made? It came to pass, when the sons of Jesse were come into the presence of Samuel, in order that he might make choice of the most suitable person, that Samuel looked on Eliab, and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." But the Lord said, "Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Then Jesse made Aminadab to pass before Samuel; and he said, "Neither hath the Lord chosen this." Then Jesse made Shammah to pass before Samuel; and he said, "Neither hath the Lord chosen this." And so of seven of his sons; till David passed, who, like Gideon, was "least in his father's house;" and then the Lord said unto Samuel, "Arise, anoint *him*, for this is he."

Take another instance of this sovereignty on the part of God, in the choice of instruments to effect his purposes. Is Goliath of Gath to be slain, the giant whose height is six cubits and a span? he shall not perish by the hand of Saul, nor by the hand of any of the strong and mighty men of Israel; but David the *stripling* shall go forth in the name of the Lord of hosts; he shall put off all the armour of Saul first; and, instead of sword and spear, shall do the mighty work with a sling and a stone, that it may be known that the battle and the

victory are the Lord's. "Thou comest unto me," said the youthful warrior to his antagonist, who had been "a man of war from his youth;" "thou comest unto me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come unto thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

Was not the same sovereignty evinced even in the promulgation of the everlasting Gospel? Though it was to make its way through all the opposition of infidelity, all the cavils of the learned, all the influence of the great and opulent, as well as all the prejudices of the carnal heart, the Lord would have it preached by the poor despised fishermen of Galilee, that it might be confessed, "This is the great power of God." Thus " God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

I have dwelt upon this point, because the whole history of Gideon seems to preach to us that important doctrine, viz. the power and sovereignty of God, as displayed in the manner and means of accomplishing his purposes.

We mark, in the next place, some points in Gideon's *character*. First, His *consistency* and *decision*. Notwithstanding his retired situation, he had testified, it seems, against the prevailing idolatry; and even in his father's house had kept himself from his father's sins. He appears to have gone on quietly and consistently in the ordinary course of his lawful occupations, serving the true God himself, and praying for those who were worshipping idols. Accordingly God manifests himself to Gideon, owns his work of faith and labour of love, and tells him he is not alone, for "God is with him." Let it comfort those who are serving God *alone* in their families, to think of Gideon, and God's favour towards him. You are not alone; for "greater is he that is with you, than they that are against you." Though your foes may be they of your own household, yet fear not to go on straightforward, serving God, whatever others do; for, depend upon it, Gideon's God is with you. Pray for those who are

yet afar off among your family, that they may be brought nigh. You know not whether your prayers and example may not have such an effect upon them, as that they may be brought eventually to the acknowledgment of the truth. This appears to have been the case with Gideon; for you find afterwards, that his father Joash actually justified the plucking down of Baal's altar. Thus Gideon gained his father. And who knows how many souls are gained, in private families, (to go no further,) by the consistent, decided, and holy life of one real Christian?

Mark, in the next place, Gideon's *ardent patriotism*. He does not distinguish himself from the rest of Israel, though God does. He identifies himself with his country. When the angel says, "The Lord is with thee," Gideon says, "If the Lord be with Me," meaning the whole nation; for Gideon was a real *patriot*; his fear of God was connected with the love of his country; he mixes the happiness of Israel with his own, and makes it, as it were, a part of it: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" His thoughts were bent upon the welfare of Israel, as his prayers were offered up for it.

It would be well if we were to endeavour, in our individual capacity, while walking humbly with our God, to serve the land in which we live. Like Israel, there is idolatry in it; the true God is not worshipped as he should be, though his name is professed. Can we do nothing for it? We may not be called to fight her battles; but we can pray for the peace of our Jerusalem. We may not be called to high public situations in life; but we may do private good, both temporal and spiritual. We have all a talent to exercise and to account for. Oh see to it, that by your means your country is in some measure benefited. Gideon's prayers were heard for his country; Gideon's testimony against idolatry was acknowledged of God; Gideon's example was not without its influence in a national as well as private point of view. And the man who lives according to the Gospel, a life of faith and practical holiness; who denies all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and lives soberly, righteously, and godly in the world; the man who distributes the word of God, and is himself a living commentary on its excellence; the man who reproves sin, as Gideon did, by consistent holy conduct; such a man may convert many a sinner from the error of his way, and save

many a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins, (and what is it that makes national sin but the multitude of individual sins?) by bringing, here and there, a fellow-creature to a knowledge of Gideon's God, whose blood was shed to cleanse from all sins, and whose righteousness is a spotless robe to cover them. This man is a lover of his country, and a blessing to it; and though his name may not be recorded among the warriors and statesmen of a nation, it is written in heaven; though he may be in comparative obscurity here, his character is known above; he is recognized as a citizen there; his witness is in heaven, and his record is on high; and the day is coming, when it shall be told to the assembled worlds, that he was one of the deliverers of his country—that he was among the wise, whose counsels were the nation's safety; that, being a real Christian, he was "a prince and a great man" in our Israel, though Israel might not have known it; that he helped to defend and protect the country, by the blessing of God on his prayers, and on his exertions to do good to his fellow men. In this sense, the private Christian is a public blessing. And to the man who dares to be on the Lord's side, when all around are against him,—who has boldness to withstand the opposition which the ungodly make, and courage to face the idolatrous world, and to declare, "As for me, I will serve the Lord;" to that brave soldier of Christ we may say, as the angel did to Gideon, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Lastly, we are told from whence Gideon's might and valour were derived: "The Lord looked on him," and said, "Go in *this* thy might, and I will be with thee; and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." "The Lord looked on him." Oh what a look was that! what a smile of encouragement cast on Gideon by his God! what a token of love! what a communication of strength and faith! *There* was the "might" which the angel spoke of! "Go in *this* thy might." Gideon had none of his own. That look and those words gave it him. He had before said, "How shall I deliver Israel?" but these words gave him courage. He had before said, "Why has all this befallen us?" but this look of the angel showed that God had not forgotten to be gracious. "Go in *this* thy might," says the angel, "I will be with thee." Gideon need not any longer doubt or hesitate, after such encouragement as this. It is the word of the Lord; and Gideon has only to cast himself upon it in simple faith, and to act according to its precepts.

These words of the angel are full of spiritual meaning, but we have only time to advert to them very briefly. It is in this "might" that we who preach would go forth to the ministry of the Gospel, that "battle of the Lord;" it is in the power of that promise, "I will be with thee," that we would rescue, by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," those who are in a far worse bondage to sin and Satan than Israel was to the Midianites. May we be as sensible of our own insufficiency as Gideon was of his; and, at the same time, as "strong" as he was "in the Lord, and in the power of his might!" and may the Lord look upon you, beloved brethren, as he did upon Gideon, in mercy! May he cast an eye of pity and compassion upon any of you that have been practically denying him, and melt those souls into repentance, as he did that of Peter: "The Lord looked on Peter," and he "went out, and wept bitterly." May the angel of the covenant cast a look of sweet encouragement on any among you who may be in a mourning, desponding state, as Gideon was respecting Israel; and enliven their hopes, and animate their faith, and strengthen their love to him and his cause, and assure them of his favour! and, finally, may the careless, the thoughtless, and the inconsiderate bear in mind that they stand in the immediate presence of that "angel" before whom Gideon stood, and that his "look" searches the heart!" Thou, God, seest me!"

And now we would dismiss you, beloved brethren, with that blessing with which the priests of old were commanded to bless Israel;" the fulfilment of which will be to you what the "look" of the angel of the covenant was to Gideon. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee! The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee! The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace!"

## SERMON II. GIDEON'S SACRIFICE ACCEPTED.

Judges vi. 17-24.

*And Gideon said unto the angel, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour; the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it.*

*And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth: and he did so. Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes: and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom.*

The former part of Gideon's history, which has already been considered, shows not only his pious desire for the welfare of his country, but his *humility* when called upon to become the deliverer of it. He says, "Wherewith shall I deliver Israel?" and when the angel, in order to convince him that it was Jehovah himself that sent him to that work, says, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man ;" Gideon cannot believe that it is so,

until he have some token of his power: "Give me a sign that thou talkest with me." It may be said, that this hesitation was Gideon's infirmity. Connecting it, however, with the circumstance of its being himself that was called forth to the mighty work of Israel's deliverance, I cannot but consider it as an evidence of his humility. And would to God, dear brethren, that all *our* scruples, with regard to engaging in the service of God, arose from the same cause! Surely it is not to be wondered at, if those whose work is still more arduous than Gideon's, (I mean the ministers of the everlasting Gospel,) should pause and hesitate before they enter upon it. It is not to be wondered at, if a man entertain many secret misgivings as to the call of God to *him*, when he considers how mighty an undertaking it is, viz. to rescue perishing sinners from the bondage of sin, immortal souls from the captivity of Satan; and if he should say, under a sense of his incompetency to such a work, as Gideon did. "What am I, that/should deliver Israel?" On the contrary, let a man scrupulously examine himself as to his motives, and *so* let him enter upon the all-important duties of the sacred office, that he may be able to give "the answer of a good conscience towards God," when that heart-searching question shall be put to him, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God, for the promotion of his glory, and the edifying of his people?" Oh that "a live coal from off the altar" of a Saviour's love might touch the heart and lips of every prophet in our day, before he ventures to say, "Here am I, send me!" If he depend on his own strength, he will never "deliver Israel;" if he rely on anything but "the Spirit of the Lord of hosts," he will never "save a soul from death," nor "hide the multitude of sins." Until he have Gideon's humility, he will not have Gideon's fitness for his work; and until he is enabled to feel the truth of the apostle's words, "Paul is nothing, and Apollos is nothing/" he will never look to God to "give the increase."

And would to God that all the objections and scruples which are made by those whom we invite to activity in the Lord's service, proceeded, as Gideon's did, from *humility!* What is the reason that, when we ask the co-operation of many in some labours of the Lord's vineyard, they all, with one accord, begin to make excuse? Is it a humbling sense of their own unfitness for the work? If it were, we

have an encouraging text in the word of God, with which we might do away with the difficulty: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me." But when one goes to his farm, and another to his merchandise; when one has bought a piece of land, and must needs go and see it; and another a yoke of oxen, and must needs go and prove them; in short, when "men seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's," how opposed are their characters to Gideon's, whose only scruple about the work of God was, "What am I, that I should deliver Israel?" And would to God, that when humility does appear to be the source of objections to the engaging in the promotion of the cause of religion, that humility were, like Gideon's, *real genuine* humility, and not the cloak of hypocrisy, not a covering to conceal idleness and indifference; for, while the really humble are the very best instruments which can be employed in God's service, those who merely affect to be so are, indeed, what they call themselves, but what they do not consider themselves, unfit for the sacred work.

On the circumstance which forms the text we may make two observations, viz., the manner in which the angel tried Gideon's faith, and the manner in which he displayed his great power and godhead.

1st. We notice the manner in which the angel tried Gideon's faith. The preparation which Gideon made seems to be rather an act of hospitality than an act of sacrifice. Like Abraham of old, he entertains the stranger; and he is, in this respect, one of the instances to which St. Paul refers, when, writing to the Hebrews, he says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

It should be observed, however, that the original word used in this place signifies not only *a present*, as it is here translated, but *a meat-offering*, as it is rendered in the marginal reading; so that Gideon's preparation would serve either for a hospitable meal or for a sacred oblation, according to the character of his guest.

"He said, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock; and pour out the broth." This was intended to make way for a miracle; that Gideon's faith in the God who wrought it,

might, after this trial, become strong, according to the work which he was shortly to undertake.

It will be remembered, that Elijah made way for the miracle which God was about to work, for the confusion of Baal's prophets, by placing the sacrifice in the most unlikely state for consumption by fire. He said, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the sacrifice, and on the wood." And he said, "Do it the second time." And they did it the second time. And he said, "Do it the third time." And they did it the third time. And when all was in such a state as to exclude the suspicion, or the possibility, of the sacrifice taking fire but by miracle, then Elijah prayed, and "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." It seems to have been for the same purpose that the angel commanded Gideon to lay the flesh upon the cold rock, and to pour out the broth. All suspicion, and all possibility, of the communication of fire were to be done away. Gideon obeys, looking for the "sign," and wondering how it shall be given.

The giving of the "sign " will show us, 2dly. The manner in which the angel displays his great power and godhead. He does not offer up prayer for fire from heaven on the sacrifice, as Elijah did. He himself communicates the fire, and makes the sacrifice. There is a beautiful majesty in the manner in which it is depicted in the text. "Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight:" ascending in the flame of the sacrifice; as if to intimate, that, being God, and not man, the Lord of angels, and not a created angel of the Lord, the sacrifice should be surely accepted by him whose fire had consumed it; and intimating to us, that it is only in and through him who was made a sacrifice for us, that the offering of our services can be accepted in heaven. How sweet the thought, that when the Christian presents his sacrifice of praise, and prayer, and thanksgiving, there is one who, as his Mediator, can make it acceptable, one who ever liveth to make intercession, even "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!" and therefore, said

the apostle Paul, when writing to the Hebrews, "Seeing that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Yes, there is a holy boldness which believers are authorized to use, when they present themselves in his name, and petition for his sake, at the throne of the heavenly grace. Let us plead that all-prevailing name, dear brethren, while we yield up ourselves to the service of God: "Here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee."

Having made these remarks on the circumstance, let us observe the *effect* which it had upon Gideon's *mind* and *conduct*.

The effect which it had upon his *mind* was this: he said, " Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." There was so much of the majesty of the Godhead in the miracle which the angel had wrought, that the divinity beamed, as it were, through the appearance of his manhood. He made himself known as God in that sacrifice, just as he was known to the disciples at Emmaus, by the breaking of bread, after his resurrection, though in the outward form of a wayfaring man: "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight."

Gideon was afraid. It was a received opinion among the Jews, that any vision of the divine glory would be fatal, in consequence of what God had declared to Moses. When Moses said unto the Lord, "I beseech thee shew me thy glory," the Lord said unto him, "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live." Now, Gideon would not have been thus terrified at the sight of a created angel, however he might have been surprised, for that would not have been seeing *God*: and therefore he seems to have uttered this exclamation from a conviction that he had seen the divine glory itself. "Alas! for because I have seen the angel Jehovah, face to face;" as Jacob said, in admiring gratitude, after wrestling with the angel, (the same which Gideon saw,) "I have seen God face to face,

and my life is preserved." But it may be asked, "How was it that Gideon survived the sight? If it had been said to Moses, "No man shall see my face, and live," how did Gideon live? The answer will open to us some precious Gospel truths. Gideon saw the glory of God, indeed, but it was "in the face of Jesus Christ." "No man," says St. John, "hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." In other words, whenever there has been a manifestation of Jehovah to his creatures, it has been by Jesus Christ, the second person in the ever-blessed Trinity; and it is by his having tabernacled in our flesh, that the awful majesty of Jehovah has been softened into mildness, and peace, and love. God seen out of Christ would be "a consuming fire," taking vengeance upon transgressors; no man can see Jehovah thus, and live: "In thy sight shall no man living be justified." But to behold God in Christ, is to see him reconciling penitent sinners to himself; is to see him "just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." In this connexion, then, how delightful is the thought, that, in seeing and knowing him, we see and know the Father also! And not only so, but we discern, through him who is "the way, and the truth, and the life," that "his Father is our Father, and his God our God!" "Shew us the Father," said Philip, "and it sufficeth." Jesus said unto him, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" Precious truth! what should sinners, such as we, do without it? "I and my Father are one," saith Christ. Without that union, what wrath would fall upon us to the uttermost! The believer's rejoicing is, that Jesus is "the brightness of the Father's glory;" and therefore he can look upon it, and live; yea, live by looking upon it, and because he looks upon it. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, O all ye ends of the earth."

Mark here the answer of God to Gideon. The Lord said unto him, "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die." We do not now wonder at this gracious answer, after taking into \* consideration the character of the angel from whom it came. Was it not from him who "made' peace by the blood of his cross," who is called "our peace," and "the Prince of peace?" Yes, it was an answer that fitted his priestly and his mediatorial character. He might have

said to Gideon, what he has since said to us in the Gospel, "I came that you might have life, (not death,) and that you might have it more abundantly." Oh! we were all given over unto death eternal; God had declared the sentence, "Thou shalt surely die." But Gideon's angel passed by, and said unto us, " Live." Sin had wrought perdition; but he had strength to pluck the brand from the burning, willingness to put himself in the sinner's stead, and, by the price of his own blood, to buy the captive, and set him free; and all his obedience unto death, all his sufferings upon Calvary, all his agonies upon the cross, speak these words to the penitent soul that applies to him: "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die." "Peace be unto thee," for I have made peace by the blood of my cross. "Fear not," neither death nor hell; for I have conquered both. "Thou shalt not die;" for I have died, that thou mightest live for ever. If Satan, or his angels, or principalities, or powers, lay anything to thy charge, answer all by saying, " It is God that justifieth; it is Christ that died." "Thou shalt not die. Because I live, thou shalt live also." In speaking thus, do we not describe what has passed in your heart, believer, when you were first awakened from the sleep of carnal security, and began to tremble to think of the consequences of sin, and the terrors of the judgment? When you saw God, as revealed from the top of fiery Sinai, issuing that holy law, the language of which is, "Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things which are written in the law, to do them," did you not cry, in fearful apprehension, "Alas! O Lord God! who then can be saved / Your soul was in need of the same consolation as Gideon's; and did you not receive it? Were you not directed, in the word and by the Spirit of God, to another mount, where there were no terrors, no denunciations? A mount on which you might behold God, and live because of that sight? A sight of God *incarnate!* of God suffering for *sinner!* of God making an atonement for *your* sins! Inviting you to the privileges of a full and free redemption, by faith in him! We need put no interpretation upon the angel's words when we address you. They apply themselves to your heart, as containing the whole message of a Saviour's dying love: "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die!" But does the impenitent sinner see nothing in this passage which is calculated to affect his mind? Let him think of this, that he shall one day see the "angel" before whom Gideon trembled; shall see him as Gideon saw him, "face to face ;"—but

mark—not veiled, as he was then, in the appearance of a man; not disguised in the garb of lowly human nature, but in the glory which he had before the world was; not with a staff in his hand, like a wayfaring man, but swaying the sceptre of the universe, with heaven for his throne, and earth for his footstool, and all the angels ministering unto him. And mark his character then. He shall come, not to touch a sacrifice, not to work a miracle, not to confirm the faith of an individual, as in the case of Gideon, but "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." He shall come to be our *Judge*. And if Gideon trembled to look upon him then, how will the impenitent and unbelieving tremble to look upon him in the day when he cometh to the judgment! "Every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him." And it will be laid to your charge then, impenitent sinners, however you may now scoff at the idea, that *you* "crucified the Lord of life and glory, and put him to an open shame." Can you bear this thought? To see him face to face! We know where it is written, that "many shall call for the rocks to fall on them, and for the mountains to cover them from the *face* of him that sitteth upon the throne!"—a countenance dreadful for them to behold, not because it is the face of him who is, to look upon, like a "jasper and a sardine stone," but because it is the face once covered with shame and spitting, *for the sinner's sake*; the face once smitten with the palms of the hands of his murderers, *for the sinners sake*; the face down which ran blood from the crown of thorns, *for the sinner's sake*; the face in which beamed all the mercy which that sinner has disregarded, and all the loving-kindness which he has scornfully set at nought. Oh that this thought may check the sinner in his progress, and bring him to sue for that mercy and lovingkindness which are offered to him now at the throne of grace, but which it will be too late to hope for when Gideon's angel shall sit upon the throne of judgment. Think what will then be the value of those words, "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die."

We come now to show, in the last place, the effect which this circumstance had upon Gideon's *conduct*. "Then Gideon built an altar unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom." This he did to commemorate the event. It was a day much to be remembered by Gideon, both on his own account and Israel's; and therefore he built this altar. The name which he gave it is beautifully descriptive of the

circumstance: "The Lord is my peace;" taking that comfortable assurance which God gave him, for the motto to inscribe on it: "Peace be unto thee!" It is remarkable that holy men, in former times, seem to have been uniformly careful to *record* their mercies. Thus, when Abraham's faith had been tried by God, and his beloved Isaac had been spared to him, he called the name of that place "Jehovah-jireh," saying, "The Lord will provide." When Jacob had received tokens of God's favour in his vision, he poured oil upon the stone which had been his pillow, and called it "Bethel," saying, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." And when he had received further manifestations of the divine mercy, on his return to his own country and his father's house, in wrestling with the angel, (the same which Gideon saw,) he called the name of the place "Penuel," saying, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." When Moses had obtained a victory over the Amalekites, he built an altar, and called it "Jehovah Nissi, the Lord is my banner." And Samuel recorded a like victory over the Philistines, by taking a stone, and setting it up, and calling it "Ebenezer," saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Not to mention more instances of the pious gratitude of the Old Testament, we may take shame to ourselves for want of a closer imitation. Does the God of battles bless our arms, and give us victory? We build a monument to the glory of the conqueror, whom God has honoured as the instrument; but where are the hearts in which an altar of praise is built unto the Lord, and on which is written, "The Lord is my banner?" Does God restore a dear child from the brink of the grave, and give him, like Isaac, to his parent's arms again? The parent clasps him to his breast, and says, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found;" but how seldom does he remember the mercy by a commemoration of it, like Abraham's "Jehovah-jireh." Does God "give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them?" We begin to pull down our barns, and build greater; and to say to our souls, "We have much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry!" But how few, from Dan to Beersheba, from one end of the country to the other, how few look upon "fields white unto the harvest," and count the sheaves which God has ripened for them, with thankful hearts, and say, "We will raise an Ebenezer, for hitherto the Lord hath helped us!"

But there is one character who does record his mercies, and that is the man whose mercies have been of a nature which have effected a change in his heart; melting and subduing what was before hardness, and impenitency, and unbelief, into contrition, and gratitude, and love. To such a soul this commemorative word of Gideon is a cordial: "Jehovah Shalom; the Lord is my peace." That soul looks back to many a "time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," when the church in which he has worshipped has been a "Bethel" to him; not only "the house of God," but "the gate of heaven;" or when he has raised an "Ebenezer" in private, at the throne of grace; or when he has found, at the Lord's table, that the Lord's banner over him was love. It will be profitable to mark these mercies, Christian, as you journey towards Canaan. Let God's providential dispensations towards you, your trials as well as your comforts, your sorrows as well as your joys, all be noted by you, that they may all be sanctified; that you may refer to them as so many waymarks pointing out the road which led you to the Lamb. And when you come into the presence of Gideon's angel, and see him face to face, you will pay a tribute of praise to all eternity; not by rearing an altar, or erecting a pillar; but by casting your blood-bought crown before him, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood."

# SERMON III.

## BAAL'S ALTAR DESTROYED BY GIDEON.

Judges vi. 25-32.

*And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down. Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night. And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said one to another, Who hath done this tiling? And when they enquired and asked, they said, Gideon the son of Joash hath done this thing. Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death, whilst it is yet morning: if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.*

In pursuing the history of Gideon, we see his character unfolding itself; and the more we see of his character, the more we perceive how remarkably he was fitted for the great work he was to undertake. We will glance at that part of his character which

presents itself in the verses which I have just read; and, as we proceed, make some spiritual and practical comments upon it, for our own edification.

1st. Observe God's command to Gideon. He had been hitherto protesting against the idolatry of his family and country by a life of opposition, inasmuch as it was a life of humble pious fear, and love of Jehovah, and of the worship of him as the true God. But now he is commanded to perform an act of opposition. He is to take his father's "second bullock," probably because its age of "seven years" corresponded with the length of time that Israel had been in captivity; and he is to "cut down the grove" where the image of Baal was worshipped, and to "throw down the altar" which his father had built to offer sacrifices on to that idol. By this it was intimated that God is a jealous God, and will abide no unhallowed mixture in his worship. Gideon is to destroy Baal's altar before he builds God's; the same altar will not do; God will have no polluted sacrifice; if there is any connexion at all between the two, it shall be only this, that the wood of Baal's grove shall be made fuel to burn the sacrifice on Jehovah's altar.

Now, may not this act of Gideon's, under the *Old* Testament dispensation, be made to speak the language of the *New*? "No man can serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and Mammon," any more than God and Baal. Oh no; God will not abide the mixture; nothing is acceptable to him which ascends from the polluted altar of that man's heart, which has a sacrifice on it one day out of seven for Jehovah, and a sacrifice to Mammon every other day in the week. How incompatible, irreconcilable, and contradictory, the two objects of worship are, as well as the services of the worshippers !" What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"

But it is a noble act, worthy of the imitator of Gideon, to make the things which were before "an occasion of falling," the instruments of doing good, by putting them to a sanctified use; making them subservient to the furtherance of the Gospel, instead of

fostering "the lust of the eye and the pride of life," as they did before. This is cutting down Baal's grove, and making fuel with it for God's altar. In this sense, we are commanded to "make to ourselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness." Have you really desired to overthrow every idol that is in your heart, Christian? Is it really your prayer that Christ should be your king, and lord of every motion there? It is well; but let not Baal's grove be standing, after his altar has been overthrown. Whatever has been the accompaniment of your idol-worship, cut it down, and apply it to a holy purpose; make it fuel for the altar of God.

But where shall Gideon build the altar of God? Is it to stand in the place of Baal's? No; as if this were a contamination, the thing is forbidden: "Build an altar unto the Lord upon the top of this rock." The reason was obvious. That rock was the place where the angel of the covenant had met him; that rock was the place on which the miracle had been wrought, to show the godhead of him that wrought it, and to confirm the faith of him who witnessed it. That rock was the place from whence ascended the sacrifice which the angel had made acceptable by ascending with it. That rock had already witnessed the manifestations of God to Gideon; and there was written, as it were, upon it, "Jehovah-shalom."

There was a fitness, therefore, in the place for the altar; there was something in the place typical of him to whom the altar was to be built; so that it might be said of it, in that sense, what Christ speaks of the rock in the wilderness, "That rock was Christ." In the margin, the word is rendered "a fortress or stronghold," perhaps because it was a place of defence against the Midianites. But, oh, how insecure against any enemy must that place have been while the altar of Baal was there! How unworthy the name of "a stronghold," with no stronger god to defend it than one of wood or stone! Only "the name of the Lord is a strong tower," and only "they who run into that are safe." But now the Lord seems to say, "Make the place *indeed* secure, by building *my* altar there, and place it under my protection, by calling upon my name; and I will keep it safe."

It was for want of that "altar" upon that "rock," that the Midianites so grievously oppressed the Israelites, notwithstanding

all their attempts to make it a fortified place; and it is for want of the same, in a spiritual sense, that the soul of many a professing Christian is brought into a worse than Midianitish captivity, even the bondage of sin and Satan. He tries to fortify his heart with the "munition" of his own fancied righteousness, as if it was a "munition of rocks;" and to strengthen himself in his own resolutions, unaided by divine grace, as if they could keep him safe. He knows not, all the time, that his heart has deceived him; that, instead of keeping out his enemy, his enemy keeps him in; and that what he calls a stronghold for him, is, in fact, the wall of his own dungeon. Oh, it is time to ask, on what do we build our expectations of eternal life, our hopes of everlasting happiness? It is easy to say, "We build them on a rock;" but is that rock *Christ*? Is the god to whom you build your altar Gideon's God, "Jehovah-shalom?" If not, he is "a consuming fire," and not "a God of peace:" your altar is no better than Baal's; your sacrifice wants the angel of the covenant to ascend with it, to make it acceptable; your "stronghold" must give way when storms descend, and the winds blow, and the floods beat against it; and great will be the fall thereof. If you would stand in the evil day, build upon that rock; for "on that rock," he has himself said,— "on that rock he will build his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

2nd. Observe Gideon's prompt obedience to God's command. He seems to have begun the destruction of idolatry that very night in which God had given the command. He "conferred not with flesh and blood." Indeed, if he had paused to do that, there were many carnal reasons which might have suggested themselves to his mind, particularly the personal danger to which it would expose him. But Gideon "conferred not with flesh and blood." In doing it by night, he does not seem to have feared detection, but opposition and hindrance. His object was to do the work, and then to leave the consequences in the hands of him who had commanded it to be done. The promptitude of Gideon's obedience is a point of his character worthy of our imitation. Oh the sad effects of procrastination in matters which respect the overthrow of the idols of the heart, and the dedication of the heart to God! How is it, that when the command of God is proclaimed to do this, there is such hesitation and delay? How is it that the same command must be

repeated again and again, and that it is so seldom obeyed after all? It is not so much from a determination not to obey it at all, as from a fallacious hope of being better able to comply with it at some other time, which time is constantly keeping its distance, in proportion as life itself advances.

It was thus that Felix, the Roman governor, deceived himself. The apostle Paul had "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come;" and so affected was Felix by that reasoning, that we are told "he trembled." Now, all but himself would have thought, surely, that when he was so moved by the solemn consideration, and while the apostle was near to instruct and advise him, *then* was the time to cast down the idols of his heart. But no: Felix *did* "confer with flesh and blood;" he delayed and put oft' the holy work, which he ought to have done instantly, until he should have what he was so deluded as to suppose "a more convenient season;" and that season *never came*.

How long halt ye between two opinions?" Choose ye *this day* whom ye will serve." Do not with one accord begin to make excuse; but "*to-day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;" *to-night*, before you give sleep to your eyes, and slumber to your eyelids, begin the work of Baal's destruction, by imploring the aid of the "stronger than the strong man armed;" yea, *this moment*, while the command is sounding, while God is waiting to be gracious, while the Holy Spirit is promised, while the mind is in some measure moved, while the affections are kindled into some holiness of desire, and the poor cold heart is roused into some warmth and energy,—*now* let a prayer ascend for strength to strike the blow which shall destroy Baal's kingdom there, and make way for Christ's. Tomorrow may be too late.

3rd. We notice the influence of Gideon's character and conduct over those who were in his service: "Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord said unto him." It seems that Gideon had not only kept himself from the defilement of his country's idolatry, but that he had used his influence and authority in endeavouring to preserve his servants from it also; and now, when he has to perform a work beyond his own strength, a work in which

not one man in his father's house, nor in all Israel, can be found to help him, the hearts of his own ten servants are made willing to unite with him; and they give him a proof on which he can depend, that his counsel and example have had a proper effect, by assisting him at the risk of their lives.

Here, then, is a point of Gideon's character which deserves the imitation of every *master of a family*. Gideon keeps his own servants from bowing the knee to Baal. He instructs them in the knowledge of the true God. His authority is exercised for the best of purposes. Can we wonder to see a want of good principle in our servants, if we take no pains to inculcate it, nor to show them the value of it by our own character and conduct in our families? Are we properly aware of our responsibility, with regard to the souls of those who are in our service? If we leave them without those means and opportunities of religious instruction which it is in our power to give them, for the reformation of their manners, the preservation of their morals, the renewal of their hearts, and the salvation of their souls, God will require it of us; and he will reckon against us that evil and corrupt example, by which they were led into sin, or encouraged in it.

It suggests also a word or two of admonition to *servants*, a class which forms an interesting portion of almost every congregation. We wish to see you, who are servants, sensible of your privileges, as many of you as are favoured with masters and mistresses who care for your souls, and would bring you up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Are you situated in families where God's altar is reared for family prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures; and are you permitted to attend divine worship? What a mercy is this for you! Remember, "to whom much is given, of the same shall much be required." If you slight your mercies, and fail to profit by your advantages, God will require it of you. And you who have a desire to go where Baal is worshipped, and not Christ, where the world and its sinful vanities are sought after, instead of "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," either for the sake of more time to consume in idleness and sin, or more wages to spend upon them; remember that the word of God declares, "the wages of sin is death." Think of this text when you are admonished to attend the

house of God on the Sabbath, instead of wasting it in idleness, or profaning it by sin. Think of it when the Bible is offered you at a reduced price, by those who care for your eternal welfare, and whose desire for you is, that you may be made "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Think of it when you are told to avoid evil company, and to be separate from the vain conversation of the wicked. And, believe me, if you have, in the families which you serve, godly precept and example, family prayer, and the reading of the holy Scriptures, you possess what is of more real value to you than any amount of wages could procure. Make the best use of your spiritual advantages. They are "talents" entrusted to your charge, and must be employed for God's glory and your eternal benefit. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."

4th. Observe, how professing Christians may often be put to confusion and shame, by a comparison with those very idolaters whose ignorance appears so pitiable in their sight. Here is a god made of a log of wood, or a block of stone; it is a lifeless and senseless image; and yet his worshippers "rise up early in the morning" to worship him. See how diligent they are in his service, how zealous for his honour, how fervent in their devotions! Compare that god with our God, and then compare those worshippers with ourselves. "Who is a god like unto our God? or what nation is there that hath a god so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all the things that we call upon him for?" And yet what negligent worshippers many of us are! How careless about his service, how lukewarm in our addresses to the throne of his grace! The poor idolater never had his prayer granted by his god; but to whom did our God ever say, "Seek ye my face in vain?" Who ever called upon him, and was sent empty away? See the worshippers of this miserable deity calling, from morning till night, "O Baal, hear us I" and cutting themselves with knives till the blood gushes out; but there is no voice, neither any that answers. And then look at the cold formality of the man that merely professes and calls himself a Christian! See how irreverently he comes into the presence of his God, and how heartless is his worship of the great eternal Jehovah!" who upholds all things by the word of his power;" who "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and hath meted out

heaven with a span; who hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure; who hath weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance!" He is the God who hath power to cast that man into *hell*, and yet that man does not *fear* him. He is the God whose mercy invites that man to heaven, and yet that man does not love him. Awful contrast! May it alarm the careless worshipper, and make him think not only on his privileges, but on his responsibilities, lest the heathen should rise up in the judgment and condemn him; for many among them are now "turning from dumb idols to serve the living God," while he is resting satisfied with "a name to live," when he is "dead in trespasses and sins."

5th. Observe how the enmity of the carnal heart shows itself, when any effort is made for promoting the worship and glory of God. "The men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die, because he hath cast down the altar of Baal." As long as religion remains a dead letter, a mere matter of profession devoid of practice, the world will not cry out against it. But when the decisive part which the Christian takes, shows the difference which exists between him and others as to motive and principle; when his life is seen to be a constant reproach to theirs, and his love for God a contrast to their love for Mammon; when Baal's altar is cast down, and God's altar built; then the carnal mind becomes a spirit of persecution; then a man's foes become those of his own household; and because he is not content to think or speak about religion merely, but is active enough to do something for the cause, he is made to suffer for it. Hence the calumny which a zealous Christian undergoes; hence all the misconstruction put upon his good works; hence all the evil motives charged upon him, and all the hard speeches which are spoken against him. He ventures to do something for the glory of God, or the good of his fellow-sinners, or for the advancement of his Lord's kingdom. This is making so many inroads upon the kingdom of Satan; and the children of that kingdom take the alarm, become hostile, and cry, "Who is this that is overthrowing the altar of Baal? What are these who are turning the world upside down?" Any man who will thus live godly in Christ Jesus, must expect to suffer persecution. If the apostles had been content to "keep the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord" smothered in their own bosoms, they would have

had no bonds, no stripes, no imprisonment. If they had "hid their talent in a napkin," or "buried it in the earth," or put "their light under a bushel," the Scribes and Pharisees would have "let those men alone," and "refrained from them." But because they would multiply their talents for the good of others; because they would "freely give" what they had "freely received;" because they would put the light where all might see it; therefore they were "persecuted, afflicted, tormented." If the noble army of martyrs had sat still, and folded their hands, and lulled themselves to sleep, in the dark night of popish ignorance and superstition, they might have slept on with the others undisturbed. But because they arose in that dark night, and overthrew the altar of that idol, that you and I might adore the true God, as we are privileged to do this day, the idolatrous worshippers cried out, "Bring these men forth, that they may die;" and immediately the fires were kindled, and the martyrs were sacrificed to Baal. And so of Christians now: if they do nothing for the cause of Christ, they will meet with no opposition from the servants of Mammon. Why is it that so many who profess to be "on the Lord's side," live on such terms with the wicked world, that no difference is to be discovered? The fact is, they have no light that shines before men; their example puts no ungodly man to shame; they are never going about doing good; they have no generosity of soul, such as grace gives, which seeks the benefit of their fellow sinners; they have no zeal or activity for religion. Satan knows that he has nothing to fear from such, and therefore he suffers them to keep their profession on the Lord's side, satisfied that their practice is on his.

Lastly. Observe that God can "make the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he can restrain." It might have been supposed that Joash, whose bullock had been slain, and whose altar had been thrown down, would have been more enraged than the rest. But, lo! he takes the part of the accused. It seems as if he had before been secretly influenced by his son's pious example; and perhaps he was struggling with the convictions of his own mind upon the folly and wickedness of his idolatry, when the conduct of these men brought him at once to the point. "Joash said to all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? Will ye save him? If he be a god, let him plead for himself." Here was an open renunciation of idolatry in

the very person who had the most cause to be strongly attached to it. Here was a triumph for Gideon, whose past conduct and example had so wrought on his father's mind as to prepare and ripen it for this declaration: "Who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Gideon commits his cause to God; and God not only takes care of the cause, but of Gideon. And so it is, and always shall be, with the Christian who is called forth to fight the battles of the Lord. He shall be able, in the strength of his Master, to put to flight all who oppose his progress. Oh that those who have been acting the part of Joash in their families, harbouring idols and worshipping Mammon, while the Gideons around them are testifying against the iniquity by their holy and consistent life,—oh that they would reason the matter as Joash did—" Let Baal plead for himself." What arguments can he bring in support of his worship?

or will you, his worshippers, plead for him? If so, "Bring forth your strong reasons," saith the Lord of hosts. Heap together all the subtleties of infidelity, all the pleas of self-righteousness, all the excuses of the carnal mind, all the scoffs of the profane, and all the hopes of the hypocrite; and we call upon you and your god to answer these questions which the Bible proposes: "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" and "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" Now, let Baal plead; and if there is "no voice," nor any to give a satisfactory answer, then we ask again, " What profit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." If you have had no profit, if the wages of your Baal is death, then cast your idol " to the moles and to the bats;" down with his altar to the dust; and go to Gideon's God, and say, "Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy name." Then we shall see how good a thing it is for families to dwell together in unity, walking hand in hand together to heaven: Parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, all of one mind in one house, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The head of each family may then stand up among those that are dear to him, and say, "As for me and my house, we do serve the Lord; and though, in the world around us, there are gods many, and lords many, yet to us there is

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all!"

# SERMON IV.

## THE MIRACLE OF THE DEW AND THE FLEECE.

Judges iv. 36-40.

*And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.*

The state of Gideon's mind, if we may judge from these words, seems to have been that of the man who cried, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." He had already experienced the power of God to be on his side, by the touching of the rock, and the consuming of the sacrifice. He had been already assured of the favour of God towards him, by the declaration of the angel, "The Lord is with thee." Yet he seeks further assurance. We must not, however, too hastily condemn Gideon in this matter. The assurances which he had before received had given him strength equal to his day. In that strength he had already thrown down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove that was by it; and this at the risk of his life. But here he is called to new duties; we cannot, therefore, wonder at his seeking new assurances. If you look at the preceding verses, you will find how arduous those duties were: "Then all the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, were gathered together against Gideon." In this state, he blows a trumpet, to gather the

tribes to battle. But before he ventures upon the great contest, the struggle which is to decide the national fate of Israel as to liberty or bondage, he retires once more for a renewal of the assurance which God had before given him of his presence and blessing, by which alone Gideon could fight with real courage, or hope to obtain a victory.

So fights the soldier of the cross "the good fight of faith," against the world, the flesh, and the devil, under the banner of the Captain of his salvation. The world wonder to see him so continually going to his God in prayer, for fresh tokens of his favour; but they do not know, as he does, the necessity for such renewed applications. One duty after another is to be entered upon, and he wants strength for that duty; one danger after another presents itself, and he wants faith to meet it; one enemy after another comes upon him, and he wants courage and weapons to contend with it. Knowing his own weakness, he asks, "Is God indeed with me? Is the Lord on my side?" It would be well, dear brethren, if we more frequently asked ourselves, "Am I doing this in my own strength, or in God's? in my own spirit, or in God's? in my own way, or in God's?" Many a shameful defeat would be spared Israel, if they were more careful to assure themselves of God's presence and blessing in what they undertake, even if they sought again and again for the tokens. It would prevent many mistakes, for instance, with regard to what are termed *providences*. How apt are we to interpret them in such a manner as to suit the secret inclinations of our own minds! The Christian finds, frequently, that "a deceived heart hath turned him aside" in this matter. "Such a circumstance," he says, "is certainly *an opening in providence*;" when, if the truth were known, it is an opening which he has himself made to gratify his wishes, and not an opening made by God in the course of his providence. He has interpreted the circumstance favourably, and has looked upon it as a token for good, because his heart was bent upon some gratification which had reference to it. But he finds, perhaps, afterwards, that the hand of God was not so manifest in the event as he had at first supposed; and that the bias of his own mind had made him think the way to be clear, when any disinterested person would have thought otherwise. Now, it would have argued no distrust of God, no want of real faith,

had he sought at the throne of grace for *still further* assurance that he was in the right path; if he had asked counsel *yet again* at the hand of God; if he had *persevered* in his petition for the manifested favour of the Lord, as Gideon did, when he said, " Let me prove, I pray thee, yet once more with the fleece." In pursuing our subject, we may notice, 1st. The condescension of God in the performance of this twofold miracle.

Gideon's doubts and fears prevail, and he goes to God for courage and confirmation; and he obtains them. He asks still further, and he still obtains. What doctrine does it teach? It tells us that "the Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and of great goodness." The bruised reed " he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench." And, therefore, "having such a High Priest" as the angel that made Gideon's sacrifice acceptable, and vouchsafed to give him these further tokens of his acceptance, you, believer, may " come boldly to the throne of grace, and obtain," what Gideon did, " help in time of need." Your much coming for help will not weary him; he that gave you your needful portion of grace yesterday, will give you another today; yea, every day. He will give you reason to see that his promise has not failed in one jot or tittle: "Ask, and it shall be given." He will condescend to you, even as he did to Gideon. "Let the dew be on the fleece only," said Gideon, in his prayer, "and let it be dry on all the earth beside." *And it was so.* But it is the nature of wool to suck in and imbibe the moisture of the atmosphere; and, therefore, natural causes may have assisted in this. To clear up all scruple on the subject, let the miracle be reversed; "Let it now be dry only upon the fleece," said Gideon, "and upon all the ground let there be dew." *And God did so that night.* In the case of Hezekiah we find the same condescension. "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?" Then said Isaiah the prophet, " Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go backward ten degrees?" And Hezekiah answered, "Let the shadow go back ten degrees." And God brought the shadow back ten degrees, by which degrees it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz. Mark the same in the case of Joshua. God will have his people to ease them of their adversaries, and stops the very course of the heavenly bodies, in condescension to Joshua's prayer, to accomplish this design: "Sun,

stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon," said Joshua; *and it was so*. It was in the exercise of this condescension that the birth of the Saviour, that greatest of mercies, was foretold and accomplished: "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God," said the prophet to Ahaz; "ask it in the depth, or in the height above." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord my God." Then he said, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Let us now proceed to notice,

2nd. Some spiritual uses to which this miracle may be applied.

We may learn from this emblem, that *God is a sovereign God, and giveth none account of his matters*.

"God moves in a mysterious way

His judgments to perform."

We behold some nations scourged with famine, pestilence, and the sword; while others are enjoying plenty, health, and peace. We see vast parts of the globe in an unenlightened state, as it respects the knowledge of salvation; while others, like our own favoured land, are living in the full blaze of gospel day. What shall we say to these things? Why is the dew in one nation, and drought in another? Are we better than they? No, in no wise. God is showing that he will do whatsoever pleaseth him. Shall we venture to find fault, and to arraign the counsels of the Most High? Shall we, creatures of a moment, venture to speak against the eternal purposes of the triune Jehovah, or to quarrel with what he does, because we cannot tell why he does it? "What art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" When God was pleased to show his sovereignty to Israel, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, "Arise, go down to the potter's house." "Then I went down," says the prophet, "to the potter's house; and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels; and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter; and he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to

the potter to make it." Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord; Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel I" Let us fall down, and acknowledge that "the Judge of all the earth must do right;" that though "his paths are in the sea, and his footsteps in the deep waters," yet " justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne." "Oh the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

The sublime language in which he addressed himself of old to his people Israel is equally applicable to ourselves: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." We must wait his own time for the manifestation of the accomplishment of his own purposes. The mystery in which his dispensations are involved, like the prophet's "vision," is "for an appointed time;" but, like that, " in the end it will speak, and not lie." And "though it tarry," we are to " wait for it;" because "it will surely come, it will not tarry." While this "Lord of all" wraps himself in mystery, he does not hide from us his mercy. While he gives us reason to say to him, "Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour!" he seems to say to us, " What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,

And scan his work in vain;

God is his own interpreter,

And he will make it plain."

Yes; it will be seen, in due time, how admirably all the means which he employed were adapted to the end which he had in view; why those means were used at all; why they were used, and not others; and why they were not used before. We are to " walk now by faith, and not by sight;" for the present, " we know but in part," and "we see through a glass darkly." But when we shall "see face to

face," and " know even as also we are known;" when the dark veil which now hangs between us and the eternal world, shall be raised; we shall be enabled to understand why that veil was drawn between; and the lifting up of that veil, for the display of the perfections of God in open vision, and the developement of his purposes in providence and grace, shall be accompanied with one universal shout of praise from all the redeemed, " He hath done all things well! He hath led the blind by a way which they knew not! He hath led us by the right way, that we might come to this city of habitation! Just and true are all thy ways, O God, thou King of saints!"

We may view the miracle, in the next place, as *an emblem of the state of the Jewish nation.*

The contrast between the wet fleece and the dry, was not more striking than the contrast between Israel in her state of *national* prosperity under the favour of God, and in her after-state of degradation when that favour was withdrawn. And how awfully striking, when the same contrast is marked in her *spiritual* state! The miracle sets before our minds the time when the nations were lying in the darkness of idolatry, and "dry," as it respected any knowledge of God, like the earth round Gideon's fleece. When Jehovah, in the exercise of his sovereign will, called Abram from among these, and said, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;" and when, in the continued fulfilment of his own promise, he was pleased to preserve and confine in the posterity of Abraham the knowledge and worship of himself; then Israel was the "watered fleece," and all the earth beside was "dry." But how has it been since? How is it now? Oh what a word of judgment has God sent forth against that people! Because they "rebelled against the Lord of hosts, and lightly esteemed the counsel of the Most High;" therefore, " Thus saith the Lord, Let it now be dry upon the fleece, and let there be dew upon all the earth beside!" Accordingly, the Gentiles are brought in to hear and know the way of salvation; and the Jews, as a nation, remain in hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word and commandment. There is no dew unto Israel!

But, in order to make some practical use of the subject, we will consider it as *an emblem of a congregation under the preaching of the Gospel*.

It need hardly be observed, that the divine blessing upon the ordinances is often compared to the dew of heaven. Thus speaking of the quickening and enlivening effect of his word upon the heart, when blessed by the Holy Ghost, the Lord says, in Deuteronomy xxxii., "My doctrine shall drop as the rain; my speech shall distil as the dew." The metaphor is simple and sublime. As the dew distils silently, and almost imperceptibly, into the plants on which it falls, so shall God's word and doctrine, under the Spirit's influence, descend upon the soul. As the dew insinuates itself into the plant, giving it fresh life and vigour; so shall God's word accomplish the thing whereunto he sends it, giving renewed life to the soul. This figure will appear still more apt, and strong, and beautiful, if you consider, that in eastern countries, where the rain is scarce, the dew, as the only substitute, is invaluable. Hence, we find in Scripture, that the dew ranked among the choicest blessings of a land, and the withholding it, among the greatest curses. When Moses blessed the tribes of Israel, he said of Joseph, "Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, and for the dew." David, lamenting Saul and Jonathan when they fell in battle, says, as if to curse the place where they perished, "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew upon you." No wonder, then, that a simile so striking should be adopted in sacred writ, to set forth the blessings of salvation. And perhaps there is not in the Bible a finer description of a thriving state of a believer's soul, under the influences of divine grace, than that of Job, in xxix. 19: "My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch."

With these ideas attached to the word, take our text as setting forth an emblem of the state of a congregation sitting under the sound of the Gospel. And, that the emblem may lose none of its effect or application, let me suppose it to represent this congregation now before me. There is something awful, but encouraging, in the thought. Is this the house of God? Is it here that we, who minister to you in holy things, endeavour to scatter the pure incorruptible seed of his word? Do your ministers indeed count you as "God's

husbandry," ploughing with the Gospel in hope, and sowing the word of it in faith? Then our God says, "Here will I be as the dew." Are we at this moment preaching to you "the truth as it is in Jesus?" Then the dew is now falling, and it is indeed "a time of refreshing!" We have only to ascertain that the word preached is the word of God, and then we know that his blessing must accompany it; the dew must fall. But upon whom? Will it fall upon that careless soul that is as unconcerned about salvation as if none were necessary? Will it fall upon the soul of him who actually disregards the offer of salvation through a righteousness not his own? Will it fall on the soul of the poor thoughtless trifler? We answer, with Ezekiel, "O Lord God, thou knowest:" nothing is too hard for the Lord. If he do but breathe upon the "dry bones," they shall live; and if he do but speak to the deaf ears with the still small voice of his grace, they shall turn and hearken; and if he do but drop the dew of heaven upon those plants in the vineyard which appear twice dead, and fit only to be plucked up by the roots; even they shall blossom, and bud, and bring forth fruit unto eternal life! Miracle of grace! but not too great to expect from Almighty power, nor from Almighty love. And therefore we will pause, and secretly pray the God of power and mercy to do this now; that while the dew is descending, some drops may fall on these souls, carrying conviction to their consciences, and conversion to their hearts. If it were not for this confidence which we have in God's power and mercy, how could we preach the Gospel? No, ray dear brethren, we could not exhort a single sinner among you to "flee from the wrath to come," unless we had God's own promise on our side, that "the doctrine shall drop as the dew." But when we find that promise fulfilled, Sabbath after Sabbath, in the "turning of the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," we are enabled to open our mouths boldly, never despairing of the salvation of any, but praying for a blessing upon all.

But who are they that are come as the publican came into the temple, saying in their hearts, "God be merciful to me a sinner?" They must be blessed. Who are they who are come as the inquiring Greeks came to Philip, saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus!" They must be blessed. Who are they that are sitting before us, saying, as Cornelius and his friends did to the apostle Peter, "Here we are

present before God, to hear all the things which are commanded thee of God." They must be blessed, even as Cornelius and his friends were blessed. "It came to pass, that while Peter spake the word, the Holy Ghost fell," like the dew, "on all them which heard it." But we ask, also, where is the dry and empty fleece? Oh how quickly may we find it in any congregation! We may find it in those seats where there has been no prayer, but only the *form* of prayer; we may find it in those pews where there is no attention to the preached word, nor any desire after the salvation which it holds forth. In short, wherever carelessness and indifference prevail, there we shall find the dry and empty fleece. Should any such be present, I must say, in pastoral fidelity, it is awful to think, my dear hearers, that, so long as the Gospel has been preached in your ears, it has never yet reached your heart. It is awful to think, that, though the dew of the divine blessing has been dropping upon the congregation, time after time, refreshing and invigorating one after another, it should never yet have dropped on *your* soul? Why is this? Is it because, when you called, God refused you the blessing? Is it that when you earnestly entreated, saying, " Bless me, even me also, O my Father!" he said, "No, I will not have mercy?" Is it that when you fell down before him, in humility, saying, "Behold, I am vile, therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," he spurned you from him? No, you cannot say so. It is because he has called to you, in these very ordinances, and you have refused; it is because he has been stretching forth his hands, and you have not regarded: "therefore the heavens over you have been stayed from their dew," and your soul has been as " a dry fleece." Oh let not this opportunity pass without a prayer for grace. It is said respecting the answer to Gideon's prayer, "The Lord did it *that night*." "Ask, then, and it shall be given *you*; seek, and *you* shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to *you*." Let the subject teach us, next, to pray for each other, as ministers and congregation. Our church has framed an appropriate prayer for us; we have long *used* that prayer; but have we *prayed* it? Connect that prayer with this subject, and see how important it is: "Send down, O Lord, upon our bishops, and curates, and all congregations committed to their charge, the healthful spirit of thy grace; and, that they may truly please thee, pour upon them *the continual dew of thy blessing*." Surely, if we were to put forth this prayer in all its meaning, it would draw down many a blessing; it

would moisten many a dry fleece among us, and fertilize many a barren soul. If God answered Gideon's prayers, will he not answer ours? Yes; the gracious promise which I have just quoted has a less gracious declaration attached to it: "*Every one* that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it *shall* be opened."

Lastly, let the subject teach us to pray, and look for, the coming of that time, when "the knowledge of the glory of God shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." Gideon's fleece, as the emblem of Israel, shall be watered yet again. It has long remained dry, but we believe that God is now hastening the time when all Israel shall turn unto him, and be saved; when the fleece, and the earth around, shall be alike wet with the dew of heaven; when the Jews and the Gentiles shall be alike blessed with the knowledge of their redeeming God; when the prayers of the church shall be answered, and the promise of our God fulfilled; when Jesus shall be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." I said, "For this let us *look* and *pray*. May I not add, "For this let us *labour* also?" God works by means, and what means can more properly be used, what instruments should we expect to see more effectually engaged, in the conversion of Jews and Gentiles, than those who, as members of the Church of England, have been so long beseeching God "for all sorts and conditions of men; that his way may be made known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations?" Only let us act as well as pray, and act according to what we pray; and by our means the "dry fleece" of Israel and the "dry ground" of the Gentiles round it, shall be graciously watered from above; and our church shall rejoice that the perseverance in well-doing of her own members has called down from the throne of grace an answer to her own comprehensive prayer: "O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made; nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics; and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ

our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen."

To this prayer of our church let me add, in conclusion, the injunction of St. Paul: " Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, *always abounding in the work of the Lord*, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

# SERMON V.

## THE TRIAL OF GIDEON'S ARMY BY THE PROCLAMATION.

Judges vii. 2.

*And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands; lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now, therefore, go to; proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand, and there remained ten thousand.*

We come now to a part of Gideon's history which forms a practical commentary on two portions of God's word, on which the faith and comfort of the Christian may always securely rest, viz. "Not by might, nor by power; but by my Spirit," saith the Lord God of hosts; and again, " God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence; that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." The circumstances in which we here find Gideon placed will enable us to illustrate and apply these passages of Scripture.

Gideon has now obtained the necessary assurance of God's favour; and he takes courage to blow the trumpet, to collect the forces of the various tribes, if, haply, after all the strength he can procure, Israel may be able to stand before those fearful enemies, the Midianites, of whom it is said, that they "lay along the valley like grasshoppers, and whose camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side, for multitude." We may conceive Gideon, in

such a season of anxiety, hoping that more hearts will be stirred up for the arduous contest, and more warriors be found to offer themselves willingly in such a cause; when, lo, the Lord says unto Gideon, "The people are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands." What a majesty there is in these words! "Too many for me;" too many for me "to *give* the Midianites into their hands!"

In consequence of this intimation, Gideon's faith is to be tried by the lessening of his army upon the very eve of battle; and the courage of the army is to be tried, that it may be seen that \*' with God it is a little thing to save by many or by few." As this trial respected Gideon, it was no slight one. To see, on the one hand, the Midianites "as grasshoppers for multitude," and, on the other hand, twenty-two thousand turning their backs on their enemies at the very first sound of the trumpet, must have been a fearful sight indeed. It must have driven him for consolation to God's own promise, and have compelled him to act by faith upon that as his only stay. The proclamation was the touchstone which tried these men, of what spirit they were. All, no doubt, looked equally bold before the trial came, and when there was no line of distinction drawn; but no sooner does Gideon proclaim, "Let every one that is fearful depart," than twenty-two thousand confess that they are afraid, and turn back. Their cowardice will appear the greater, if you consider their previous encouragements, which, doubtless, Gideon had set before them. He may be supposed to have said, "Fear not, soldiers, for God is with us. He assured me of this himself, when I was threshing wheat in my father's winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. At that time he looked on me, and said, 'Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.' Wherefore, soldiers, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was said unto me. Yea, he has already confirmed his word by many gracious tokens of his favour; he has accepted my sacrifice; he touched it, and there came fire out of the rock and consumed it. And when I trembled for fear of death, because mine eyes had seen the Lord of hosts, he said, 'Peace be unto thee: fear not; thou shalt not die.' In the strength of this gracious encouragement, I have already thrown down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove that was by it; and when the idolatrous worshippers would have slain me for it, God suffered them not; and all Israel have seen that Baal cannot

plead for himself. Nay, more: I have asked of God yet further tokens of his favour, and he has granted them; when I asked for dew upon the fleece, he gave it; and when I asked for dew upon the earth, he gave it. Are not these indubitable signs that Israel's God has not forgotten to be gracious, and that he has not shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure? Now, then, if his Spirit have descended upon your hearts, soldiers, you will cast your idols to the moles and to the bats; you will shake off the yoke of your oppressors, and serve the Lord under your own vine and fig-tree. Up, then, and be doing. The Lord our God is with us, and he will deliver us from our enemy. But if there is one man among you fearful and afraid, let him return, and depart from Mount Gilead."

Supposing Gideon's proclamation to have been accompanied with these encouragements, what conduct, think you, was to be expected on the part of the people? Surely, you say, a flocking to the standard, a shouting for the battle, a rejoicing in the assurance of Jehovah's protection and favour, mixed, perhaps, with shame that they had so long suffered the Midianites to lead them captive at their will. But, no; what shall we say when Israel turn their backs upon their enemies?—twenty-two thousand go home. Unmoved by all the encouragements offered, unconcerned for their country's deliverance, and fearful of exposing themselves to danger, they slink back into all the degrading servitude of Midianitish captivity, idolatry, and oppression. The description is lamentable and affecting. But oh, dear brethren, there is a point of view in which to contemplate it—I mean with a spiritual application, that renders it a thousand times more lamentable and affecting. We may see in it a picture of the outward and visible church of Christ militant here on earth. Nay; to make the picture more striking still, it may be called a representation of the various congregations of which that outward and visible church is composed. What is a congregation of professing Christians, but an army enlisted under the banner of the cross; soldiers engaged to contend with one common enemy, which would hold them in a bondage worse than Midian's? And what is every faithful minister of the Gospel, but the leader of this host, the Gideon of the army? And what is the preaching of the Gospel, but the "proclamation" which calls our people to the battle against the Lord's enemies and theirs? Like Gideon, we who minister to you can

tell of assurances and tokens of the Divine favour, which should rouse our people to make war with sin and Satan, and to "fight the good fight of faith." We can tell them of a better sacrifice than Gideon's having been accepted on their behalf; we can point to "the angel of the covenant" himself, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." There is no fear of *dying* by looking on him. No, look upon him, that you may *live*. Not to look on him is to die. It is with sinners now, as it was with Israel in their plague from the fiery flying serpents: "It came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked on the serpent of brass, he lived:" for "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so hath the Son of man been lifted up, that whoso believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To all those who thus look to him, in faith, for salvation, the angel of the covenant speaks "peace" by the blood of his cross, and says, as he did to Gideon, "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die." Is further encouragement necessary? We can give more than Gideon did, when he spoke of the destruction of Baal's altar. We can testify that the enemy against whom we are called to fight has been already vanquished; that the Captain of our salvation has "led captivity captive;" that he has "overcome death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" that he has "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross;" and that, in all these things, they who fight under him shall be "more than conquerors, through him that hath loved them." Did Gideon represent the "dew" upon the fleece and on the earth, as an encouragement to his followers? We can testify that the very "dew" of the heavenly favour and blessing is even now poured out abundantly on the means of grace, moistening many a dry fleece, and fructifying many a barren spot; and that the word of prophecy and promise is as sure as ever, that "God will be as the dew to his Israel;" that he will water his church from above; and that, in the fulness of time, the whole country of the enemy round us, which is now so dry and barren and desert, shall "blossom as the rose," and become like the Garden of Eden; and that the church shall stand in all the beauty of Balaam's prophetic description: "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth; as gardens by the river's side; as the trees of signaloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the

waters." Thus shall it be when Israel possesses the land of his enemies, and when that shout of victory shall be raised, "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."

And if we have greater *encouragements* than Gideon to offer, we have also more fearful *warnings* to hold out. We call to the remembrance of all whom we address the *baptismal vow* by which each is bound to "fight the good fight of faith;" and the stamp and impress of *the cross on his forehead*, as a mark by which he is to be known as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ:"—"We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock, and do sign him with the sign of the cross; in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified; manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." We tell our hearers of the awful consequences of being taken captive by the enemy; we declare to them, that they who are so overcome will be led to a prison from whence there is no escape, and dragged to an execution which will never be over.

It may be asked, "Is it possible, that with such tremendous consequences hanging on the battle, men should not answer to the call? that, with everlasting chains and slavery on the one hand, and eternal life and liberty on the other, the army of Israel should contain any who, through fear, will make no resistance to their enemy? Alas! so it is. The spirit that is in them is one of cowardly inactivity, and it "cleaveth unto the dust." They need a new heart and a new spirit to be put into them, before they will enter upon the warfare against sin and Satan; and a new heart is a heart of *loyalty* to the "King of kings," a heart actuated by the principle (the only constraining principle) of *love* to him. Till this is given from above, there will be the same lamentable torpor and indifference even in the Gideons of the army, as in the army themselves. In the 34th verse of the former chapter, we read, "But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon," and *then* "he blew the trumpet." So the same Spirit must come upon him that leads, and upon them that follow, before the Gospel trumpet will be blown effectually by the one, or hearkened

to at all by the other: I say *effectually* blown, for "if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle V

This trumpet we would blow today. We blow it in the ears of those, who, like Gideon's army, appear to be all equally "on the Lord's side;" but " the Lord knoweth them that are his." Gideon's proclamation, too, shall be ours: "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return, and depart from Mount Gilead." It is right to sound this proclamation, that men may " count the cost." The herald of the " King of kings" is not to seduce men into his Master's service, by representing only the fair side of religion. If we say, "Religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" we tell you too, (and it is honest to do so,) that in another sense those ways are " hedged with thorns and briars," and that the life of a believer is a constant warfare. Both scriptures are equally true, and both truths are equally necessary to be preached. The Israel of God know what it is to have *peace* in the *heart* of the city, and yet *war* continually on the *borders*. If we speak of religion as a life of *enjoyment*, we testify of it also that it is a life of *self-denial*. While we say unto the righteous, "It shall be well with him," we say, " Many are the afflictions of the righteous;" and if we declare that " the redeemed of the Lord shall go up to Zion with everlasting songs of joy," we declare, in the same breath, that" they must through great tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." But if " the Spirit of the Lord" come upon those who hear this " proclamation," then these apparent contradictions will be reconciled, the seeming mysteries will be all made plain; and it will be understood and felt, that Christ has a yoke to be borne by his people, but it is easy; that he has a burthen to be carried by them, but it is light; that he has a service for them to engage in, but it is perfect freedom.

Depending upon "the Spirit of God" to make known these "things of God," we are to set before you good and evil, bitter and sweet, life and death, and then to say, "Choose ye this day." We tell you that your enemies "lie along the valley" of life before you; but we say, " God will deliver them into your hands." We tell you " they are as grasshoppers for multitude;" but we say, "Greater is he that is with you than all they that are with them." We tell you that Midian is " a strong man armed;" but we say, that in Israel's host there is a

"stronger than he," that shall "come upon him, and overcome him, and take away all his armour, and divide the spoil." In short, we tell you that you will have to "wrestle, not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places;" but we direct you to the "breastplate of righteousness, and the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Having declared this, we blow the trumpet, and cry, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart!"

Now, brethren, if the whisperings of men's consciences could be heard in the pulpit, as they are heard in heaven, what reply, I ask you, would yours be found to make to this appeal? If the motion of the body corresponded with that of the mind, would there be none discovered among us "departing from Mount Gilead?" Would there be no man found to steal away from the spiritual battle through fear? Let conscience judge. Or if the *reasons* which urged the "fearful" to depart were to be given in, as each left the field, what would they present? Let me suppose a few. One is afraid that the service of Christ is *too austere*; it requires too many privations. There is a favourite sin which he must quit if he engages in the battle, a darling lust which he must renounce, if he takes part in that warfare: he cannot bear the thought of "cutting off the right-hand," and "plucking out the right eye;" and he goes his way, forgetting that it is declared by our Lord to be "better to enter into life halt or maimed, than having two hands or two eyes, to be cast into everlasting fire."

Another is "afraid" of being *ridiculed* or *despised* for entering decidedly on a religious course of life. The evil names which are cast upon those who "follow the Lord fully" intimidate and alarm him: he says, with some of old, "As for this sect, we know that it is everywhere spoken against;" and thus he becomes "ashamed of Jesus." He forgets that it is written, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and speak all manner of evil of you falsely, for my sake;" and again, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."

A third is "afraid" of being "*righteous overmuch*." He is ignorant of our Lord's comment upon that term, in his sermon on the mount: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; neither sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, that they may have glory of men." *That* is being "righteous overmuch." And "when thou prayest, be not as the hypocrites; for they love to stand in the corners of the streets to pray, that they may be seen of men." *That* is being "righteous overmuch." Such an one forgets, too, the picture of the man "righteous overmuch," which our Lord has drawn: it is the Pharisee standing in the temple, and saying, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are." Now, mark the sad effects produced in his mind by this ignorance. Does a man *feel* religion? Does he *mean* anything by his profession of it? Is he *earnest* in prayer, and *anxious* to resist sin? In the estimation of the character I am describing, this man is "righteous overmuch;" he "goes too far." But is it so? then surely he was "righteous overmuch," who smote upon his breast, and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" and he was "righteous overmuch," who came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and cried, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and those three thousand who felt the effects of St. Peter's sermon, so that they were "pricked in their heart," must have been "righteous overmuch," when they cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In short, if this be the proper interpretation of the word, then there is an instance of this "righteousness overmuch," whenever there is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth. Surely there is something very awful in such a "fear" as this. "Afraid" of being too holy!" afraid" of loving God too much! "afraid" of being too anxious to "flee from the wrath to come," and too earnest to "lay hold on eternal life."

It was not such a fear as this that St. Paul spoke of, when, writing to the Hebrews, he said, "Let us therefore *fear*, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to *come short of it*." Nor was it any such apprehension as this that our Lord contemplated, when he said, "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate,"—" *Agonize* to enter," (so the word is in the original.) And the reason which he gives for this earnest and intense desire, this struggle for eternal life, is the most affecting that the mind of man can contemplate: "For many, I say unto you, *will* seek to enter

in, and *shall not be able*; when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door; and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open unto us:' and he shall answer and say unto you, 'I tell you, I know you not, whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.' There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves cast out."

Away, then, with such disgraceful fears as I have been speaking of! They are unworthy of the Christian's character, and disgrace the name that has been put upon him, viz. that of "a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Tell me, brethren, is the soldier "afraid" of being thought too zealous, when fighting in his country's cause? Is the patriot "afraid" of being thought to love his native land too much, when called upon to act in defence of its laws or its liberty?" No," you say, "in such a cause let him put forth all the ardour of his soul, like Gideon. He cannot be too earnest, when his life, liberty, country, are at stake. Coldness is a crime in such a case; we love to see him warm, and active, and vigorous." And yet, when we call on men to fight for *spiritual* life and liberty, with hell and destruction on one side, and heaven and happiness on the other, do not many seem to say, "I am afraid of being too much in earnest, too warm, too active, too zealous, in that matter?" Oh, may the Spirit of the Lord come upon us; and then our only fear will be, lest we should not strive after salvation so earnestly, and love our Redeemer so fervently, and serve him so faithfully, and fight under him so valiantly, as we are bound by our allegiance to do.

Time would fail to enumerate all the fears of the faint-hearted. Some are afraid of sacrificing their *worldly subsistence*. When we invite them to follow Christ, they act like the young man mentioned in the Gospel, who "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Such persons do not put our Lord's question to their hearts, "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Others "depart from Mount Gilead" for fear of *persecution*. Our Lord describes such as appearing, for a season, what his followers *should be*. But "by-and-by," he says, "when persecution ariseth

because of the word, they are offended;" and then, by degrees, "they fall away." Thus, "the fear of man bringeth a snare;" that snare is "the snare of the devil;" and they who fall into it are "taken captive by him at his will." Their final doom is described by St. John, in Rev. xxi. 8, where we find "the fearful" coupled with "the unbelieving and the abominable," and made to "have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Now, among all the characters whom we address from the pulpit, these are the most deceiving and the most self-deceived. When we exhort them as soldiers of the cross, they listen, perhaps, to the exhortation; when we tell them of a warfare to be accomplished, they hearken possibly to our discourse; when we point out the enemy, all appear outwardly to be ready to engage; but when we say, "Come now, and testify, by your *lives*, that you are in earnest in your profession; that you mean what you say, when you declare, without reserve, "Here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls, and bodies!" How many depart! how few remain! Is it not the fact, that when twenty-two thousand left Gideon and departed from Mount Gilead, while only ten thousand remained, the proportion was not greater, if so great, as that which our congregations exhibit, of those who turn their backs in the day of battle, after having sworn allegiance to the Captain of their salvation? But we say to such, that he who is indeed "on the Lord's side," will love the oath of allegiance, and prize it as his highest privilege; that he who feels his own unfitness for the battle, and yet knows that it must be fought, will, instead of "departing from Mount Gilead," go to that spiritual armoury where he may obtain weapons, by the use of which he shall be "more than conqueror, through him that hath loved us." Who, think you, dear brethren, will be crowned with glory at last, but those who deem no pledge too great, no engagement too strong, no oath too binding, no covenant too solemn, which is intended as the holy bond of union to the Lord Jesus? Did he not himself become the pledge for sinners? Has he not entered into an engagement to rescue his people from everlasting burnings, and exalt them to his own right hand in heaven? Did he not covenant that he would, on their behalf, fulfil the righteousness of the law, and suffer the penalty of it? and has he not sworn by

himself, because he could swear by no greater, that they should have strong consolation, who have fled to him for refuge, as the hope set before them in the Gospel? Let us think of this for one moment, and then ask ourselves, what is it that should keep us back from the entire dedication of our hearts to him? and what are we doing, in withholding them from his service, but refusing the substance, for fear of losing the shadow; disregarding the glories of eternity, for fear of sacrificing the vanities of time; and dashing from our lips the "milk and honey of Canaan," for fear of no longer tasting the vile "fleshpots of Egypt" V

We close with a word of encouragement to those who still keep their post in the field of battle. To such we say, "Dearly beloved, and longed for, our joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord." Yea, brethren, "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Our blessed Saviour once put an affecting question to his disciples, when many "went back, and walked no more with him:" then said Jesus unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter answered and said, and I trust that your hearts and ray own do the same, "Lord, whither should we go? Thou hast the words of everlasting life." Is not this your feeling towards him who has done all for you? Cherish it, I beseech you, in your hearts. It will enable you to "stand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand."

Remember that this cleansing of the church, like the reducing of Gideon's army, is preparatory to a still more trying investigation, when the *final judgment* shall take place; when the "proclamation" shall be given by sound of the *last trumpet*; and that sound shall wake the dead. Ah, who can tell the comfort enjoyed by the soul that is patiently enduring unto the end! "looking for, and hasting to, the coming of the day of God!" waxing strong in the faith, by thinking of the *sacrifice* that Gideon's angel has made, and the *peace* that he has spoken to his people 1 viewing him as "the Captain of salvation," who can give strength and courage to fight, and then will crown the conqueror, according to his own blessed declaration: "To

him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

The church of Christ may appear small in its militant state, but it shall be large in its triumphant state. Let not the smallness of its number alarm the soldiers of the cross; "it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom ;" yea, "the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." And when that is obtained, the host of God's spiritual Israel shall stand up " a multitude which no man can number." Oh that we may be found among them in that day, when the Lord Jesus Christ "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe!"

"Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burthen of the flesh, are in joy and felicity; we beseech thee that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

SERMON VI.  
THE TRIAL OF GIDEON'S ARMY  
BY THE WATER.

Judges vii. 4.

*And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped, will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.*

It might be supposed, when the army of Gideon had been tried, as before mentioned, by proclamation, so as to reduce it from thirty-two thousand to ten thousand men, while the Midianites were an undiminished host, "lying along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude," that enough had been done to secure the glory of the victory to the God of Israel, instead of the Israelites taking it to themselves, as it is said in the former verse, "Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." But God is not satisfied with even this: it must be rendered still more clear, and more perfectly indubitable, that it is God's hand alone that can do the work, before he will put forth that hand to do it; and, therefore, in jealousy for his glory, and for the completeness of his operations, he says to Gideon, "The people is yet too many."

With regard to Gideon himself, and those in his army who were his faithful followers, we may conceive them just recovering from their surprise and grief, that so many should have deserted them when the "proclamation" was made; and endeavouring to strengthen and encourage each other in the promises which they had received, and the tokens for good which had been graciously afforded them by God; while Gideon, perhaps, is so staggered by this alarming diminution of his forces, that he finds it difficult to call his faith into due and sufficient exercise, and is ready almost to go to God again for another "sign" of favour and acceptance.

Those among you, dear brethren, who know what *spiritual* warfare is, have experienced, at various seasons, difficulties somewhat resembling Gideon's. You know what a hard task it is to exercise a simple reliance on God; taking the Almighty at his word, and resting calmly on that, in opposition to all the gloomy aspect of present circumstances of distress, and in spite of all cavils and objections, either from the world without or from the heart within; and answering all with St. Paul's confidence of faith: " I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

But what must have been Gideon's feelings, when, instead of any further " sign" to establish his drooping spirits, and to confirm his agitated faith, he only hears these words, "The people are yet too many." It was as if God had said, "Thou hast already had the word of my promise. Stay thyself on that. God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it; or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Gideon must learn to act faith on this unchangeable word of God; he must prove what faith really is, viz. "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This is needful for Gideon's future success against the enemy, as well as for the present establishment of his own character, and the beneficial effect of his example on the men who are to share in the blessings of the victory. And, therefore, instead of another miracle of fire on his sacrifice, or dew upon his fleece, or any further " sign" to give him encouragement at present, it is only said to him, " The people are yet too many." It is thus that the private Christian is tried frequently, that he may learn to trust in the Lord during the dark days of

adversity, and to stay himself on his God in times of difficulty and danger. There is a tendency in him naturally to lean on some earthly prop, some "arm of flesh," for comfort or support; but God will not have it so: he says, "Send all these away; they are too many for me to work by, and too many for you to trust in: let your eye be single, and your heart simple; and then stand still, and see the salvation of God!" And saying this, he strikes away another prop, that the soul may rest wholly and exclusively on himself. In the exercise of faith the believer submits to this, acquiesces in it, sees that there is a necessity for the providential dispensation, sharp and painful as it may be; and, therefore, sending away all but Jesus, he goes forth to the endurance of the affliction, or to the conflict with the foe, as Gideon did when he dismissed, at the command of God, so many thousands of his followers.

Let us now consider this second trial of Gideon and his army: "Bring them down to the water, and I will try them for thee there." They were led to the water, perhaps, after their fatiguing march, and in the expectation of immediately joining battle. The "bowing down upon their knees to drink" might intimate a want of that alacrity and eagerness to engage which the others showed, who were content to take a little water in their hand, and convey it to their mouths, as they passed hastily along; so that when God said, "By the three hundred that lapped will I save thee," he intimated that he would use the instruments which were outwardly suited to the work by a spirit of self-denial, as well because of that visible fitness for the task, as because they were so few in number. And we may ask, whom does God employ in his service, but those who can "endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ" / "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." There are many who say, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," without recollecting our Lord's answer, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Indulgence of self is not the character by which our Lord's disciples are recognised. Look at the first promulgators of the Gospel; they "endured hardness." St. Paul gives a specimen of it in 2 Cor. xi. 24. "In journeyings often; in perils of waters; in perils of robbers; in perils by mine own countrymen; in perils by the heathen; in perils in the city; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea; in

perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." This was "enduring hardness as a good soldier of Christ." Look also at those instruments which God employed in different ages of the world afterwards, the noble army of martyrs; all men of a self-denying spirit, patient and laborious men, enduring the heat and burthen of the day; they "loved not their lives unto the death;" they "counted not their lives dear unto them, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry which they had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the Gospel of the grace of God." Look, too, at the chosen vessels which the Lord now employs to convey the Gospel treasure to the heathen world. They are few, like Gideon's worthies; but they are men of the same gracious stamp, or they would not be fit for the work ; men who can make sacrifices; who deem the coming of Christ's kingdom in the world as the great object for which the world was made ; and who, for the sake of assisting in its accomplishment, will set their faces as a flint, endure all hardships and privations, if by any means they may save some. It was such instruments as these that God employed to rescue our own country from the bondage of satanical idolatry and bloody superstition. It was by such as these that we were ourselves delivered from a yoke worse than Midian's. We may say, as the church does in the ninth of Isaiah, alluding to this deliverance of Israel by Gideon, "Thou hast broken the yoke of our burthen, and the rod of our oppressor, as in the day of Midian."

It is, doubtless, in reference to our earliest national deliverance from idolatry, as well as to celebrate the subsequent triumphs of divine grace at the Reformation, that the language of the 44th Psalm has been introduced into our Litany: "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them." And it is necessary to tell of these " noble works" again and again, to hand down the record of them from generation to generation, for the same reason which the psalmist gives when recounting the deliverances of Israel by the interposition of the hand of God: "We should not hide them from the children of the generations to come, but shew the

honour of the Lord, the mighty and wonderful works that he hath done; that their posterity might know it, and the children yet unborn." Such a record is calculated to stir us up to gratitude and praise to that "Lord of all lords," who "remembered us in our low estate, for his mercy endureth for ever;" and to excite in our hearts a reverence and love for the character of that missionary servant of God, (probably the holy apostle Paul himself,) who, constrained by the love of Christ, ventured on our inhospitable shores; and, at the risk of being sacrificed to an "unknown God," had the holy boldness to say, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you;" who, seeing our forefathers wholly given to idolatry, making their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and defiling the land with their blood, dared to lift up the standard of the cross, and to wave the banner of Christ over the very altars of the devil, and to cry, " Britons, behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

There is, moreover, another reason for thus handing down the record of these "mighty acts of the Lord" on our behalf; and that is, that we may feel the importance of encouraging this blessed missionary spirit in our own day, for the purpose of sending the same "glad tidings of great joy" to those nations who are still "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death,"—that darkness of sin and miserable idolatry from which we have been thus happily delivered. Oh, let us have compassion on our fellow sinners, even as our first missionaries had pity upon us. Let us learn to cast away self-indulgence; and let us bear in mind, that our talents should be consecrated, and that our purses, our exertions, and our influence, should all be laid, in a spirit of self-denial, on the altar of the Lord, and dedicated to the service of our God.

But not to confine our subject to a missionary sense, let us draw it out into a more general application. If God has his chosen men to fight that battle which is to establish his kingdom upon earth, and his dominion over that of Satan, let it be remembered that there is a battle which each must fight for himself, and a warfare which every individual must engage in on his own behalf. Christian, there is a mighty host encamped against you: their name is "Legion," for they are many. Not only are Satan and the World opposed to you, but

*your own heart* is an enemy, an enemy in the camp, and ready to betray you continually to the foes that are without. Yes, the corruptions of the heart, its evil propensities, its carnal affections, compose more than a Midianitish army, though *they* were "like the grasshoppers for multitude."

Now as Gideon took his men to the water, and tried them there, so we would bring your heart and conscience to the spiritual test which the subject may be understood to signify. Are you a self-indulgent Christian? The two terms have no connexion with each other. If God discard the "fearful," will he retain the "carnal?" If he dismiss those who are so cowardly that they dare not enter upon a profession of his religion, will he bear with those who have the audacity to live in the disgrace of it? To affect to serve God one day, and really to serve divers lusts and passions another; to pretend to be one of "Christ's church militant here upon earth," and yet actually to make no resistance to the enemy; this is only showing, that instead of being, as you profess, a soldier of Christ, you are, in reality, a servant of Mammon. "Know ye not," says St. Paul, "that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" It may be answered, "What can be plainer?" And yet the lamentable truth is, that many who profess to be on the Lord's side, and to contend against his enemies and their own, bow down in a state of carnal security and sinful gratification, and "drink in iniquity like water," insensible of the danger; while the enemy looks on, pleased to see the soul in such a carnal and self-indulging state, knowing that "the end of those things is death." Tell us not, ye that are thus carnally minded, of any warfare that *you* are waging with the great adversary of souls. Talk not of the battle of the Lord in which *you* are engaged. The fact is, that you are already taken prisoners by the enemy, you are already led captive by him at his will.

But the active soldiers of Christ need refreshment, as Gideon's chosen band did; and they have it. What are the ordinances of divine grace, when blessed to the soul, but "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord?" David counted them as such when he wrote the 84th Psalm: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord God of

hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Blessed are they whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are thy ways; who, passing through the valley of Baca," (or "vale of tears," for such is the wilderness of this world to all who are really marching to the heavenly Canaan,) "use it for a well; the rain also standeth in the pools. They go from strength to strength, till unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Zion." In another Psalm, he says, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O Lord." The divine ordinances, thus blessed to his soul, are strength for a believer against his enemy: "He drinks of the brook in the way, therefore shall he lift up his head;" and, in the strength thus afforded him, "he shall not be ashamed to speak with his enemies in the gate." No, the good soldier of Christ is not without his needful refreshment. The Captain of his salvation has proclaimed throughout the host, not only, "Let every one that is fearful depart," but also, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters I" yea, "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely."

And now God says to Gideon, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save Israel; and let all the other people go every man to his place." It was enough to have called up many fears in the mind of Gideon and his chosen men, as I before observed, to see so many drafted off from them again; twenty-two thousand in the first instance, and now nine thousand seven hundred more; leaving behind only three hundred to contend with their innumerable enemies. But God had said, "By those three hundred will I save you;" and faith must take God at his word, and trust him for the fulfilment of his promise. Accordingly, we hear no complaint from Gideon. When he is commanded to send the men away, he sends them, one after another, by the hundred, and by the thousand; not knowing when God would stay his hand, or say, "It is enough." This is faith, vital and practical faith. It is exactly that faith which the Christian is required to carry into the common transactions of life, and to act upon in the occurrences of every day: "The just shall live by faith." In the evil day he is to live upon it, when God takes away the desire of his eyes, or the means of his present subsistence, or the outward helps and props which he has been accustomed to, and on

which, perhaps, he has been leaning too confidently. When these are struck from under him, then the proof of his faith, is that he can "trust in the Lord, and stay himself on his God." The prophet Habakkuk did so, who said, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, and there shall be no fruit in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; though the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet will I joy in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." And the apostle Paul thus trusted in the Lord, and stayed himself on his God, when he declared, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 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." The language of one of our Christian poets is beautifully descriptive of this state of a believer's mind—

"Give what thou wilt, without thee I am poor; And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

Have you been feeling any of these deprivations, Christian? Has one comfort after another been taken from you? Say not, "What have I left?" Gideon's angel, Gideon's God, is with you. You have "Jehovah-shalom" with you, and he shall be your "peace" in the midst of all your troubles; you have "Jehovahjireh" with you, and he shall "provide" for you in the midst of all your deprivations; you have "Jehovah-nissi" with you, and he shall be your "banner" in the midst of all your enemies. If your heart be "strong in the Lord," you will look on patiently and resignedly, as Gideon did, when his army was diminished to a handful of men, though the Midianites were still in the valley. The language of meek, enduring, patient faith is, not merely "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;" for this may be the language of despondency, and may be used where there is no acquiescence in the divine will, nor even submission to it: but the language of such faith, when it looks upon the wreck of all its hopes, and comforts, and prospects, is, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; and *blessed be the name of the Lord.*"

We concluded our last discourse by addressing a word of encouragement to the little army of real believers who remain on the Lord's side. I directed the christian warrior to those words, "I will give thee a crown of life ;"—"to him that overcometh will I give to sit down on my throne, even as I have overcome, and am set down on my Father's throne;"— "hold fast that thou hast, let no man take thy crown." I may give him more comfort now, and say, As there is no cause of dismay on your own account, seeing that the battle is the Lord's, and that it is he that fighteth for you, so neither is there cause for fear on account of the progress of his kingdom upon earth. Remember, "he *must* reign till all enemies shall be put under his feet;" " As I live, saith the Lord, all the earth *shall* be filled with my glory." Now, if God hath said this, who shall hinder it from coming to pass? If God has made the promise, what shall stand in the way of its fulfilment? Not the Midianites in the valley, though they be "as grasshoppers for multitude;" not " the wrath of man," for that shall be "made to praise him;" not "an arm of flesh," for it is declared "cursed" to think so; not " the gates of hell," for they that turn them on their hinges know that "they shall not prevail."

We are apt to tremble for the cause of the Gospel around us, when we see many depart, and walk no more with Christ. But let those who remain think of the concern which their own souls have in the matter. Have some drawn back? The Captain of salvation says, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Is the number of the fearful or disaffected great, and is it increasing? No matter if it be twentytwo thousand. "What is that to thee *I* follow thou me." We are apt to be alarmed for the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom abroad, when we hear of the death of those who are gone forth as missionaries to promote it. But instead of desponding at this, dear brethren, knowing as we do the truth of his promise, and his power to fulfil it, ought we not rather to consider it as intended to try our faith? Yes; it is only the voice of God, saying to us, "The people are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands." Certainly it is our duty to use all the means which God puts in our power, to strengthen our missionary ranks; and assuredly our constant fervent prayer should be, that God would send forth more labourers into the harvest, and more warriors into the field. But, nevertheless, when he is pleased, from time to time, thus to draft off, if I may so speak, the

great men, and the strong men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, from our missionary host, it becomes us to look on with Gideon's patient faith and meek submission; to regard the mysterious dispensation as intended to make known that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us;" as in the case of Gideon it was said, "Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Thus every death of a missionary will have a voice in it of encouragement, as well as of warning, from our God; and if we listen to it with the ear of Gideon's faith, it will tell us, "The people are *yet* too many." And our answer should be, "Be thou exalted, Lord, in thine own strength: so will we sing, and praise thy power."

Lastly, remember that "the time is short." The battle with sin and Satan will soon be fought; the struggle soon over; the victory soon won; the crown soon placed upon the conqueror's head.

Let the eye of the believer take a range over all the things of time which intervene between the present moment and eternity. Let the good soldier of Christ view the land before him. Seest thou these kingdoms of the earth? They shall all "become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." Seest thou that Canaan? It is "the glory of all lands, and floweth with milk and honey;" it is a land of rest and peace; it is a promised land; it is all *thine*; the Lord has said, "Unto thee will I give it." It is true, Jordan rolls between; but "when thou passest through the waters, he will be with thee." It is true, there is yet the last enemy to be destroyed; but meet him only in the power of faith, and in dependence on the Captain of salvation, who has conquered him already, and then the apostle's song of triumph shall be thine: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day."

# SERMON VII.

## GIDEONS VICTORY OVER THE MIDIANITES.

Judges vii. 16—22.

*And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every mans hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, that as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp, in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal; and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place, round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every mans sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host.*

We frequently have occasion to remark, how wonderfully the trials and encouragements of faith are blended together in the Christian's experience. The whole of Gideon's history proves this. Mark the quick succession of encouragement and trial in all that befalls him. First, he is encouraged: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour;" and his sacrifice is accepted. Then he is tried; tried the same night; tried in the exercise of that "valour" for which he was before encouraged. The Lord said, "Throw down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove that is by it." His encouragement is equal to his trial, his strength equal to his day; and

he does it at the hazard of his life. Look at him in the next stage of his career, and you see the same truth exemplified, only the trial comes first. "All the Midianites, and Amalekites, and the children of the east, were gathered together against Gideon." But immediately comes the encouragement: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon," so that he had boldness to blow the trumpet for battle; and, in order to keep alive that confidence, God favours him with assurances from the miracle of the dew and the fleece. When he is made to "wax strong in the Lord" by this, he is tried again; he is called to exercise all the faith imparted to him, by witnessing the fearful consequences of his "proclamation," where twenty-two thousand men returned back from Mount Gilead; and, afterwards, when, by proving them at the water, he lost nine thousand seven hundred more. Is Gideon ready to faint at this? Then encouragement shall be mingled with the trial. Accordingly, they come hand in hand together: at the very moment when God says, "Proclaim, whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him depart, he says also, "It is because the people are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands." And, afterwards, when he commands Gideon to "send all those who had bowed down to drink, every man to his place;" he sweetens that trying command by saying, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you."

The portion of Gideon's history which forms our subject now, is exactly of the same kind. The trial and encouragement are mixed: "Get thee down to the host, with Phurah thy servant." Fearful enterprise! But observe what there is mingled with the command; the *word of promise* is mingled with it, and that is enough. Faith, if it be genuine, lives and acts upon the word of promise: "Get thee down unto the host," saith God, "for I have delivered it into thy hand." And again: "Go, and hear what they say, for afterwards thine hands shall be strengthened." God gives graces to his people, to be exercised and employed. He will not suffer the talent to be hid in a napkin, nor buried in the earth; he will have it used, and brought into action. For instance, if the angel appear to Paul in the dark night of his shipwreck, and encourage him by saying, "Fear not, Paul!" it is to strengthen him for what follows: "Thou must be brought before Caesar." If food be provided for Elijah by the ravens, it is in order to fit him for the work which God has appointed him to do. And if the

angel of the Lord come, and say, "Arise, and eat;" it is not that the prophet may "eat and drink" merely, and then "lay him down again;" but "arise, and eat, because the journey is too great for thee." And he finds, afterwards, the reason why this support was given him, viz. to enable him "to go, in the strength of that meat, forty days and nights, to Horeb, the mount of God." And if Gideon have strength and courage given him, it is that he may have suitable weapons to wield when he shows himself to the Midianitish foe. The Christian, then, after encouragement, is to expect trial; but in the day of trial let him expect encouragement; for "God will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it." The strength which God gives is *intended for* the day of trial: but the believer may be sure that it shall be found *equal to* the day of trial.

Gideon's encouragement at this time is of an extraordinary kind, and differing from all the former. It is derived from *a dream*, or rather, from the effect which the *interpretation* of a dream had upon the minds of the enemy: "When Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow; and he said, I dreamed; and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon; for into his hand hath God delivered Midian and all the host." Connecting this dream with the context, we have no doubt that it was of God; designed by him to prepare, the way for Gideon's victory, and Midian's overthrow. It was stated before, that God commanded Gideon to go down to the host, and to hear what they said. This dream was what he heard; and that his hands were strengthened by it appears from the next verse: "And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation of it, that he worshipped, and returned unto the host, and said, Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hands the host of Midian." We conclude, therefore, that God was pleased to put this dream into the mind of one Midianite, and the interpretation into the mind of another, for the accomplishment of his own purposes. Had Gideon heard the dream only, it is not probable that he would have put any such interpretation upon it; but finding that it had occasioned such

an apprehension on the part of the enemy, he worshipped God, as having given him a further token of Israel's deliverance.

We cannot but notice, before we proceed further, that Gideon, upon every token for good which he receives, worships God. When his sacrifice is accepted, he worships; and when the angel speaks "peace" to him, he worships; and when the dew descends upon the fleece, he worships; and when the Lord says, "I will give the Midianites into thine hand, and I will save Israel," he worships. How important a feature in the character of a believer! God's assurances in his own book, applied by his own Spirit, cannot meet the eye and heart of a believer, without having this effect upon him. When he opens the Bible, and sees that *the great sacrifice* has been accepted on his behalf; and that, because of this, he hath "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," and that "he is the propitiation for sin;" the believer cannot but worship, and adore the mercy which devised a plan, by which he, a poor helpless sinner, may "flee from the wrath to come." When he reads of the "peace" which the angel of the covenant speaks to the redeemed of the Lord, saying, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," he worships, and adores the grace which can bring him, by nature a guilty rebel, into a state of pardon, and reconciliation with his God. He can rise from his knees, as Gideon did, with comfort and assurance, when this has been given him as a token for good, and applied to his soul, at the throne of grace, by the witnessing Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost the Comforter; and he can go forth to his Midianitish warfare, his battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil, with this encouragement as his constant companion: "In the world thou shalt have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." How would the fearful and fainthearted, who had quitted the field, have wondered now, to see Gideon's face beaming with joy at such a time as this, when, after the loss of almost all his army, he was preparing to join battle! How would they have been astonished to behold his countenance lighted up with pleasure, at the very time when destruction seemed to be so near! Not knowing what had passed between Gideon and his God that night, they would have concluded him beside himself to rejoice under such circumstances as these, and to speak with confidence of victory, when all hope of being saved seemed to be taken away. So

it is that the world wonder at the calm confidence and the quiet assurance of the believer, at times when they themselves would sink into despondency, and only anticipate "the blackness of darkness for ever." The truth is, they are ignorant of the Christian's resources; they know not what has been passing between him and his God. He has been into the temple of the Lord, perhaps, and has been spreading his case there at the throne of grace, as Hezekiah did the threatening letter of Sennacherib. Or he has been to his Bible, for promises suited to his case, and he has found them; and, having found them, he has been worshipping, like Gideon, communing with his God in secret. And now he comes forth, with the promises applied to his heart; he is able to meet his trials; he is furnished with armour against his spiritual adversaries; he is "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." So that while those who know nothing of these consolations are expecting his downfall, he rises superior, and sings, "God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble." See a beautiful illustration of this in 2 Cor. iv. 8: "We are troubled on every side," says St. Paul, "yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." When we see a Christian thus "rejoicing in tribulation," thus hoping against hope, thus staying himself upon God, in times when others have no staff to lean upon, and "fighting the good fight of faith," when others have left the field; we may be sure that something has passed between him and his God, which the world knoweth not of. And when we see the flame of divine love and zeal still burning brightly in him, notwithstanding all outward hindrances, we may be sure there is one at hand, who secretly pours oil upon that flame; and therefore it is that many waters cannot quench it.

But if Gideon's joy and confidence, at such a time, would have surprised the fearful, had they been present to witness it, surely it must have cheered and encouraged the little army of the valiant who did witness it. Situated as they were, a smile of confidence upon the face of their leader must have been gratifying indeed. If their fears were gathering, this would disperse them; if their courage was wavering, this would strengthen it; if their hopes of deliverance were growing faint, this would renew and animate them; to see him hastening towards them, and crying, "Arise, for the Lord hath

delivered the enemy into your hand." Now if, as I before observed, the ministers of the Gospel may be considered as the Gideons of the army that is fighting under the banner of the cross, and the leaders of Christ's church militant here upon earth, then it is their privilege to be also, as Gideon was, the helpers of their people's joy, the promoters of their hopes, the encouragers of their confidence, and the strengtheners of their faith; and this they cannot be, but by exhibiting, in their ministrations, the blessed results of their own experience in divine things. The "man of God" should be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The captain of the host should be known by all under him to be one whose knowledge fits him for his station; whose skill and judgment in the most difficult parts of the service have been tried and approved, and, consequently, may be depended upon in present emergencies; whose valour is not rashness; whose confidence is not presumption; whose zeal is not enthusiasm; but whose determined resolution is the result of calm investigation of divine truth, deep experience in the divine life, and close communion with his God at the throne of the heavenly grace: so that when he smiles upon difficulties and dangers, his people may know that they shall be surmounted; and may catch from him the same spirit of holy resolution in the same holy cause. This is the character to which the ministering servant of Christ is continually aspiring, if indeed he has been "taught of God, as the truth is in Jesus." It is for the attainment of this great end, that we intreat so earnestly your prayers, beloved, on our behalf, and say to you, again and again, "Brethren, pray for us!" Our desire is, that when we come before you in the pulpit, we may be increasingly useful to you, by being able to preach *experimentally*; showing ourselves men of experience, both as regards our knowledge of the devices of your great adversary, and our intercourse and communion with that God and Saviour to whose grace and mercy we always commend you. In this sense, how instructive may those words of St. John be rendered, both to ministers and their congregations: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was made manifest unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship

with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John i. 1.) And equally instructive, both to ministers and their congregations, may St. Peter's words be rendered: "For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; and this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (2 Peter i. 16.) Yes, there is a sense in which the faithful and experienced minister of Christ may be said to have been with his divine Master "in the holy mount;" for such is the privilege of communion with God at the throne of grace, where he goes to plead for his people and for himself. It is this which puts the smile of holy joy upon his countenance. When he has caught a ray of the divine effulgence there, no wonder that his face, like that of Moses, should "shine," as it were, before the congregation, when he comes down from the mount of prayer and praise, where he has been "talking with God." No wonder that, after this, he can come before his people, like Gideon after he had "worshipped the Lord," full of sacred confidence, and can cry unto them, "Arise, for the Lord will deliver your enemies into your hand."

We now turn our attention to the battle itself; and with a few observations upon it, we shall close this series of discourses.

We must not forget the comment which the Holy Ghost has made upon it in Hebrews xi. The name of Gideon stands recorded there, as having fought the battle and won the victory, *by faith*. Joshua's victory over Jericho is mentioned thus: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." And then Gideon's victory is spoken of as similar to it: "Time would fail to tell of Gideon, and others, who, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises."

Mark, first, the weapons used: "He divided the three hundred men into three companies; and he put into every man's hand," not a sword, and a spear, and a shield, but "a trumpet, and a pitcher, and a

lamp within the pitcher." And with these he goes forth against the Midianites.

Mark, next, the effects produced by them: "So Gideon and the men that were with him came unto the outside of the camp, at the beginning of the middle watch; and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and they cried, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. And all the host ran, and cried, and fled; and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host."

Having thus observed the instruments used, and the effects produced by them, cast now a spiritual eye over the whole transaction, and see if it be not an instructive emblem of *the Gospel dispensation*, in its *rise*, its *progress*, and its *accomplishment*.

Was the battle won without sword, or spear, or shield?" The weapons of our warfare," says St. Paul, speaking of that battle of the Lord which he and others were called to fight in the earliest ages of the church, "are not carnal, but they are mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds."

Was the "lamp" an instrument for effecting the destruction of Midian? Every believer is "a burning and a shining light;" and our Lord's own description of all his disciples was, "Ye are the light of the world." Their light is derived from him, and he is "the Light of life." They reflect that light, and therefore the salvation of all the children of Zion goeth forth "as a lamp that burneth." He that communicates the light keeps it burning; so that, like the wise virgins, they have "oil in their vessels with their lamps." And what is the holy and consistent life of a devoted servant of God, but "a light shining in a dark place?" Our Lord considered it as such, when he said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Was the lamp enclosed in the pitcher? We have the Gospel light, as well as the Gospel treasure, "in earthen vessels." It is enclosed in the infirmity of flesh and blood; prevented frequently, by obscurity of situation, or want of natural talent, from shining now with the brightness which will be given it in the hour when the "earthen pitcher" which contains it shall be broken in pieces. It is the

Christian's privilege, however, to know that his light is one of those, small as it may now be, which shall at length, by their united brightness, dazzle and confound the powers of darkness. When the chosen band of martyrs carried each his "lamp" of Gospel truth in his "earthen vessel," during the dark night of papal ignorance and superstition, it was but a little light which could be presented to the hosts encamped against them. But we know how their pitchers were broken, and how the light burst out afterwards in the face of their enemies, illuminating the whole spiritual horizon, —a light which, as one of them declared at the stake, shall never be extinguished. "Be of good comfort, brother Ridley," cried Latimer to his fellow martyr; "be of good comfort, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

And as the "lamp" of Gospel light might be considered an ineffectual instrument, so might the Gospel "trumpet," not only when it was first blown by the disciples of Christ, but ever since its sound has been heard in various parts of the earth. How feeble in itself! We who sound it are compelled to acknowledge this. But by faith we know that "its sound shall go forth into all lands, and its voice unto the ends of the world." Nay, it shall do more than this; it shall find its way to the heart. It shall be spiritually what Ezekiel's prophecy was to the "dry bones," when the breath came into them, and they stood up a great army. It shall be spiritually what the voice of Jesus was to Lazarus, when he that was dead came forth from the grave. Did I say it shall do this? It does effect it now. I trust that many of you, dear brethren, are witnesses of its power, and can testify that its sound has reached your hearts. But the day is coming, when its effects shall be known to be such by assembled worlds; and in that day it shall put to confusion every enemy, as these trumpets amazed and confounded the Midianites. Remember, that in the church militant, as in Gideon's host, every man has his "lamp" to carry, and his "trumpet" to blow withal; not only the leaders, but all who are called to "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." The truths of the Gospel are not to come from the pulpit only; every Christian's mouth should be a trumpet to proclaim the triumphs of his Lord. Hence, when "the Spirit and the bride" are described in the Revelation as proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation, and

inviting all to partake of the blessings of the Gospel freely, we read, not only "The Spirit and the bride say, Come," but "*Let him that heareth say, Come;*" that is, let him blow the trumpet too, and pass on the word of gracious invitation, that it may reach all the nations, so that they also may be blessed.

Gideon showed his fitness for the post in which the Lord had placed him, when, putting himself at the head of his army, he said, "Look on me, and do likewise; as I do, so do ye." And the fitness of the minister of the Gospel for his post is known, when he can say with the apostle, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ;" when he is himself "a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity; sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he who is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say."

And blessed is that congregation who follow such a leader, and do as he does; who, when they see him holding forth his burning and shining light, will trim their own; and when they hear him blow the Gospel trumpet, will catch the joyful sound, and in their respective spheres will give extent and efficacy to it. When thus it is with the minister and his congregation, when this union of operation, this oneness of holy sentiment and action, are found to prevail, we have the strongest and most indubitable evidences of final success and victory; as when these three hundred men at one and the same moment blew their trumpets, and brake their pitchers, and with one heart and one voice cried aloud, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" And here be it remembered, that the extension of the Gospel is, in fact, the "sword of the Lord," by which the final victory is to be gained over the kingdom of Satan: "The sword of the Spirit is the word of God;" and, therefore, in that sublime description of the Captain of our salvation in Rev. xix., the sword by which his conquests are won is represented as *proceeding out of his mouth*: "I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations;

and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." (Rev. xix. 11.) The extension of the word of God throughout the world, as it regards the denunciations of his wrath, as well as the invitations of his mercy, is the subduing the nations with this "sword which goeth out of his mouth;" for, " the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Now, if the word which we preach be the word of God, and if the sword of Gideon be the sword of the Lord, it shall never be used in vain, never drawn without a victory, nor sheathed without a shout of triumph, until the " mighty angel" described in Revelation shall swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer. Then a trumpet more fearful than Gideon's shall sound, to wake the dead, and call them all to judgment; then a light more sudden and terrific than that which flashed from these three hundred lamps upon the astonished Midianites shall be seen from one end of heaven to the other, even the light of that glory in which the Son of man shall come, with all his saints attending, as ministering spirits of flaming fire, burning and shining lights, then, without the earthen pitcher to conceal their blaze. Then all the enemies of that "King of kings and Lord of lords" shall " run, and cry, and flee;" yea, shall cry to the rocks to fall on them, and to the mountains to cover them; and one universal shout shall be raised by all the host of the redeemed in heaven, " Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

"Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for, and hasting to, the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat!

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." (2 Peter iii.  
11.)

THE END