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At the

PROFESSOR GREEN'S SERMON.



# S E R M O N

BY THE

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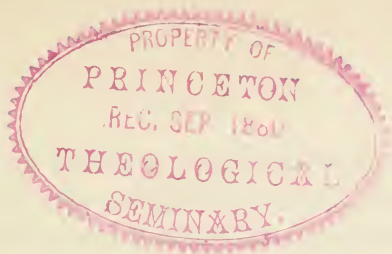
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## S E R M O N .

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ISAIAH XLIX. 3.

“Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

A NEW torrent of emotions is rushing through the American heart. The inexorable logic of events has thrust before us the ruin of our beloved country as a contingency that is possible, perhaps even probable, and at our very doors.

The occurrences of the last few weeks have prepared us to appreciate better than we could have done before the feelings awakened in a devout Jew by the prediction of the coming Babylonish exile. It was not only his patriotism which was touched by the ruin coming on his country, but his religious emotions were stirred to their very depths. His patriotism was entwined with his religion. The land that he loved was the Lord's land. The nation to which he belonged had been chosen by God from all the families of mankind to be his peculiar people. It was their mission to perpetuate and to spread throughout the world the knowledge of the true religion, and thus all nations were to be blessed in them. Jerusalem, the royal capital, was the city of the great King, where he had fixed his earthly dwelling-place: it was the only spot on earth where those atoning sacrifices could be offered, by which God was propitiated, and which were permanent types and pledges of the future more perfect sacrifice. And now shall Israel be cast off, the holy land be ravaged, Jerusalem destroyed, and the temple burned? Are then God's purposes of grace annulled? Is the

end of Israel's existence defeated? And are the glorious hopes which had been indulged, of blessings to come forth from them upon the world, doomed to sudden and bitter disappointment.

The prophet meets and answers these gloomy apprehensions in the text. Israel has been guilty, and a period of severe chastisement and trial is before him. But God has not forsaken him, nor are the ancient promises forgotten. The Lord still says to his sinful, suffering people, and may he in his sovereign grace vouchsafe a like word of mercy to our own afflicted land, "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

It is obvious that these words of consolation and encouragement contain nothing of a local or temporary nature. They are not directed exclusively, nor even peculiarly to that particular distress, which gave occasion to their utterance, but are equally adapted to every similar source of disquietude or anxiety that may disturb the people of God. They describe the divinely ordained mission of God's chosen people, and that is a fact for all time. If we were to confine our attention on the one hand to the Church's want of fidelity to the trust committed to her, her worldliness, her feeble faith, her flagging zeal, her intestine strifes, her imperfect consecration and the low state of her piety; or, on the other hand, to her weakness as compared with the obstacles in her way, the vastness of the work to be performed, or the power of those agencies and influences which are hostile to her welfare and her progress, we might easily give way to despondency and feel as though the world's salvation could never be achieved by such an incompetent and unworthy instrument. In fact, we can only escape this conclusion by directing our eyes to some such ground of confidence as that contained in the text, which is independent of all external circumstances, which rests not upon the constancy or the efficiency of the Church, but is based entirely upon the changeless purpose of an unchanging God. With this view let us turn our thoughts to this universal antidote to discouragement in the work in which the Church is engaged.

I. The first consideration which presents itself, is that the Church has been taken by God into his service. "Thou art my servant, O Israel." This carries with it a sure pledge of the accomplishment of the task, whatever it be, to which the Church is appointed. If the Church had undertaken some work of her own motion, the case would be different. We would then have to weigh carefully the reasons for and against her success. It would be a question, whether she with her ten thousand could meet and vanquish the enemy that comes against her with twenty thousand,—whether she contains within herself a strength and resources adequate to the enterprise. But if she is in the service of the Almighty, and not working on her own account, these considerations are irrelevant and vain. The workman is furnished with means and facilities by his employer. If a palace be building, the question of its completion rests not upon the scanty resources of the laborers engaged, but upon the wealth of the royal treasury. They who do the work of God are privileged and expected to draw upon his inexhaustible supplies. Whatever the task he has appointed them, he will provide all that is requisite for its accomplishment. It is his power and grace which are pledged for the issue.

If, again, it was in some self-devised method that the Church was undertaking to accomplish her divinely-appointed end, the advancement of the glory of God and of the welfare of man, there would be a question as to the wisdom of her measures and the feasibility of her schemes. The grandeur of the undertaking is no sufficient guaranty of success. Her splendid conceptions might issue in ignoble failure, because the right method was not taken to carry them into execution. But if she is working upon a scheme of God's devising, if his infinite mind has contrived the plan, and she does what she does at his bidding, and under his direction, the weakness of her understanding can be no argument of want of success.

Furthermore, if the Church is the Lord's servant, working out his ideas and not her own, then, and then only can she be cer-

tain that what she is doing is in harmony with his universal plan. God is the supreme director of all things. He guides or controls the movements of all his creatures, so that they combine to effect his predestined end. All things work together to bring about what he has purposed. This is not only to be regarded as the certain resultant of conflicting forces operating in the sphere of the world or of the universe: as though some were favorable and others adverse, yet the latter should be overbalanced by the former. But every thing that occurs conspires to urge forward God's grand design. There is nothing, and there can be nothing, which is, properly speaking, adverse to it. That which so appears to our narrow vision, would, if we could take a more comprehensive view, be seen to enter as a constituent into the plan, and to contribute its quota to the general design. Now, if the plan upon which the Church is engaged is God's plan, then it is certainly in harmony with his universal scheme: it will fit in with the rest of his glorious designs, and the whole momentum of this divine machinery is given to propel it forward. On the other hand, any plan not in accordance with this grand universal scheme must inevitably be thwarted, for it runs counter to movements which God has instituted; and it relies for its strength and support upon materials which the Creator designs to subserve a totally different end from that to which it would turn them.

Then, too, if God has selected the Church to be his servant in a given work, this is because she is or shall be made a fit instrument for what he designs her to do. For every function to be performed in nature he has an appropriate agent, which accomplishes precisely what it was intended to accomplish. It is the same in the moral and spiritual world. He selects his own instruments and they are just the ones for his purpose. His ways, it is true, are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. If we had been called upon to choose an agency for spreading the gospel over the earth, we certainly would never have thought of selecting one which would slumber over its

task as the Church has done, or which would be chargeable with such criminal inconsistencies and such shameful neglects of duty. And yet these blots upon the Church, though they may well cover her with confusion, so far from defeating God's design, or proving that so incompetent an instrument must hinder its accomplishment, only show how comprehensive that design must be, that he should make choice of such an instrument to effect it. If nothing more were to be done than to send the gospel over the earth, this could be brought about much more speedily than by our laggard efforts. It would be a profitable though humbling task to search out those enlarged views of the design of God, which are suggested by his selection of so weak and sinful an agent as the one best suited to accomplish it. Assuredly it stains all human pride and glorying, and reveals the magnitude of the work of salvation, and renders the ultimate triumph of sovereign grace more illustrious.

Nevertheless, this inevitably follows. The plan of God in the salvation of men cannot be defeated by the unfaithfulness or the incompetency of the Church as his instrument in spreading the gospel. Because her seeming unsuitableness, sinful and inexcusable as it is, is really part of her fitness, when the full comprehensiveness of God's plan is regarded. He selected the Church, knowing precisely what she was and would be, to be his servant, and nothing can ever occur to disprove the wisdom of this choice.

II. The great distinction of this servant of God is stated to be this: "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." God has a multitude of servants, each of whom is employed upon his appropriate work; and the work of Israel is to promote God's glory. The glory of God is indeed the end of all things; every one of his servants labours for that result. For his glory they are and were created. The entire material universe is his servant; and every part of it shows forth his greatness and wisdom, and illustrates the majesty of the divine perfections. His glory covers the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise. All the rational creatures that he has made,

from the lowest to the highest grade, whether they have retained or have cast off their allegiance, contribute spontaneous or reluctant tribute to the great Monarch of all. And yet the Lord here says not of this wonderful creation, not of mankind as a whole, not even of the holy angels reflecting his resplendent brightness, and prompt to execute his will, but of Israel, "Thou art my servant, in whom I will be glorified." He it is to whom especially this grand function of glorifying God has been committed. He so far outdoes all others in this respect as completely to eclipse them, and to be the only one worthy of mention.

And this justifies the tacit assumption already made, that the Israel of the text is not the carnal but the spiritual Israel. It is not the natural descendants of Abraham but his spiritual seed, who constitute the people of God, who are the heirs of the promises, and to whom he has entrusted the work of manifesting his glory. The Church of Christ is the true Israel of God, in whom the vital succession is maintained. "If ye be Christ's," says the apostle, Gal. iii. 29, "then are ye Abraham's seed." And to the unbelieving Jews our Lord denied the right to claim descent from Abraham, saying to them (John viii. 39), "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." It is not the dead branches but the living grafts which perpetuate the tree.

The Church is thus God's chief agent for glorifying him, because it is her peculiar prerogative to spread the gospel of his grace, and win all nations to the obedience of the faith. His justice and power are manifested elsewhere; it is hers to promote the triumphs of his love. Others may uphold the integrity of his empire, or act the part of loyal and obedient subjects; it belongs to her to extend that empire, to win revolted provinces back to their allegiance, to establish his reign in unknown multitudes of human hearts which had refused submission to his authority. The most precious things that the universe contains are rational and immortal spirits. The highest tribute of praise



that God can receive is the willing, adoring, loving homage paid him by such spirits, which have surrendered themselves to the impression of his greatness and his grace. And the most glorious achievement of the Godhead is the transformation of such spirits from sin and ruin to holiness and everlasting salvation. In this work, upon which God himself sets so high a value, the Church is called to coöperate. We are nowhere informed that even the most exalted of God's creatures has ever taken part in the creating of the smallest material thing. But in the new spiritual creation, which so far transcends the old creation of material things that it is declared the former heavens and earth shall not be remembered, nor come into mind, the Church enjoys the rare distinction of being a labourer together with God.

And while the Church alone thus labours directly for the furtherance of this cherished work of God, the highest honour put upon other agencies is that of ministering to her. All things are hers, and all may be laid under contribution by her for the promotion of the work in which she is engaged. They are the Tyrian workmen, to furnish and transport the materials, to hew down the cedars and to quarry out the stone, while she builds of them a temple for the Lord. The material resources of nature, the culture and civilization of the world, the discoveries of science, the elegancies of art, the refinements of literature, may all be turned by her to good account. Statesmen at the helm of government, the artisan in his shop, the merchant at the mart of trade, the philosopher in his chamber: all, in fact, who are doing anything toward the accumulation of material, intellectual, or moral wealth, are preparing what the Church may convert, as she did the spoils extorted from Egypt and the gifts spontaneously offered by Cyrus, to her own high and holy purposes. It is even a part of the vocation of the angels to minister to the future heirs of salvation. And thus the Church fulfils her priestly office. She takes the offerings of the universe, and presents them unto God, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to him.

III. But Israel must not be considered apart from him, who descended from the patriarchs and belonging to the line of the chosen people, was the one in whom all the hopes of the nation had centred from the beginning and by whom its divinely given commission was mainly to be fulfilled, the one magnificent flower for whose sake this rude and thorny plant had been for ages so assiduously cultivated. Jesus Christ came of the stock of Abraham. He was an Israelite. It was for him and unto him that Israel had been chosen, preserved and trained. Israel without Christ would be a people without a purpose, and their existence would be unmeaning, for every thing that distinguished them was involved in his appearing. Every idea that they had of their destiny, all that is revealed of God's designs respecting them or of what he would accomplish through them, was conditioned upon him. The Redeemer, who should arise out of Israel, was the pole star of his confidence in the darkest times, as well as the radiant point in every prophetic picture. It was to him in every age the assured pledge of his security, and the basis of his trust for all that was to be desired in the future. Israel without the Messiah would be in his own esteem a negation and a blank. We might as well undertake to consider the water of the globe and leave out the ocean, or to study the solar system and forget the sun.

That in the intention of the text Israel is inclusive of him, without whom Israel would be nothing, is apparent from its terms; Israel severed from the Messiah is not the servant in whom God will be glorified. It is apparent from the connexion; Israel is God's servant to bring Jacob again to him. A distinction is here unavoidable between Israel as the agent and Israel as the object in this work of restoration to God, which proves that prominent reference must be had in the former instance to Messiah as the one from whom this process of salvation was to proceed.

It is further apparent from the method of the prophet in this entire portion of his book. From the time that he announced

to Hezekiah the certain coming of the Babylonish exile, he addresses himself to the work of comforting the people of God in the prospect of this great calamity. And he does this by showing them how Israel was identified with Messiah in his work, his sufferings and his reward. Israel, it is true, is destined to unexampled humiliation and trial; but he must not despond as though God had forsaken him. It is through humiliation and sorrow—yes, though the vicarious endurance of an innocent sufferer that the work of the world's salvation and of Israel's glory is to be achieved. Messiah is here viewed as a component part of Israel; He is united with Israel under the common designation of the servant of the Lord, being the one in fact who undertakes and who fulfils the service for which the chosen people had been ordained. The whole argument of consolation is without force unless Messiah shares Israel's burdens, assumes his task and accomplishes his destiny. He, who is elsewhere represented as the King of Israel, his avenger and deliverer from his foes, is here one with Israel, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, bears his griefs, performs his service and wins for him a glorious recompense of joy.

This view of the word "Israel" as embracing the Lord Jesus Christ, which is thus so natural in itself, so necessary in the passage before us, and sanctioned by the prophet Isaiah elsewhere, is moreover in strict accordance with other scriptural analogies. In the earliest announcement of mercy, lasting enmity is declared between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and assurance is given that the former shall bruise the serpent's head. Alluding to this the apostle Paul writes to believers, Rom. xvi. 20, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." The victory belongs to all the sons of men who are not the children of the wicked one: but how could it ever have been achieved, had not Christ been of the seed of the woman and wrought salvation for us?

It was declared to Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed; but how would his seed ever have

been the bearers of blessing to mankind, had not Christ been a son of Abraham?

Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "Salvation is of the Jews;" but how could salvation have come from them, had not Jesus been a Jew?

It has been seen that Israel in the text is not to be considered apart from Christ; neither, it may be added, is Christ to be contemplated in it exclusive of Israel in its wider and proper sense. Christ as the servant by whom God is to be glorified, is one with his people by as indissoluble a bond, as Christ the everglorious God is one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Israel embraces Christ by the law of natural descent, Christ is linked with Israel by the eternal covenant of union and by the vital power of his indwelling spirit. All the scriptural statements and the scriptural emblems relating to this subject convey the idea of an inseparable union, an indivisible oneness. Thus Christ says "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The vine and the branches constitute together one plant, one organic whole. The branches cannot be produced nor live without the vine, while a living fruitful vine necessarily supposes branches, and it is through its branches and by means of the living energy which it supplies to them that it bears its fruit. The branches owe their existence to the vine, are dependent upon it, supported by it, derive from it their life and fruitfulness. The vine stands in no relation of dependence to its branches; but its whole aim and tendency as a vine is toward the production of branches, and through them it realises its end the bringing forth of grapes.

Again Christ is the head and his Church the body. The head and body compose one indivisible organism; they are not conceivable in a living state except in combination. The life of the head pervades the body, and the latter stands prepared to execute what the former shall devise. So too there cannot be a bridegroom without a bride, nor *vice versâ*.

God's believing people are said to be in Christ and he in

them; the very same terms being employed to describe this mysterious union, which are used of the ineffable relation subsisting between the sacred persons of the Trinity when Christ says, "I am in the Father and the Father in me." And such is the extraordinary power given to the people of God by their oneness with Christ that the Saviour himself assures us with that double asseveration which is coupled with many of his most weighty utterances, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do." Such, even, is the community of life between them and Christ that what took place in him, repeats itself in them. As the life of ancient Israel imaged forth that of Christ, so that of Christ images itself afresh in his people. They die with him, are buried with him, live with him, rise with him, even their mortal bodies are raised by his spirit dwelling in them. In fact the name "Christ" is in one passage of the New Testament used with such latitude as to embrace the Church of Christ as well as Christ himself. 1 Cor. xii. 12, "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: *so also is Christ.*"

If the views now presented are correct, then the "Israel" of the text embraces Christ, with all his elect people under both dispensations. This is the servant by whom God is to be glorified; and what glory does He receive from the universe beside, comparable to that which arises to him from this source? The transcendent glory springing from the work of redemption in its purchase and in its application, in its methods and its results, is that which awakens the highest admiration of the intelligent creation, and shall call for the loudest anthems of praise. The Lord Jesus lays the firm foundation by his perfect atonement, putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness by his spotless and complete obedience. The obstacles to the world's salvation are thus removed out of the way, and an effective basis laid for its reconciliation to God.

The realization of the commission given to the Church, to perpetuate and extend the true knowledge of God over all the earth, is thus rendered possible. But for the mediation of Christ, our great high priest, his sacrifice at Calvary, and his intercession in the most holy place, there could have been no restoration of the world, nor even of individual men, to God. Now, however, upon the basis of this atonement, the Church can exercise her priestly office of mediating the salvation of the world; she can enter, with assured hope of success, upon the function entrusted to her, of recovering this lost world to God.

In fulfilling this function, however, she must not be thought of as acting independently of Christ, as though he laid the foundation, and she, without further aid, reared a structure upon it. She is to bring forth fruit, fruit that shall remain, fruits of glory to God; but she can only do this by abiding in Christ. It is her union to her Head which gives the Church her efficiency in glorifying God by the salvation of men. In estimating her ability to execute her commission, therefore, we must not regard her as a simple body of men, banded together for a high and holy purpose, and animated by a sacred zeal. Nor must we seek the secret of her success in the inherent power of the truth which has been committed to her, its native superiority to error, its adaptation to the wants of the human soul. But what really distinguishes the Church, and makes her mighty in her contest with evil, is her union to Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit. She is the body of Christ, in every part instinct with his life and obedient to his volitions. He guides her motions and directs her acts. These are his members; he uses them as his living organs; he acts through them, and thus carries forward his work. It is an arm of flesh, but it is wielded by omnipotence.

It is only what the Church does, therefore, in her character as the body of Christ, which is of any avail. Enterprises of her own, begun without him and not conducted by him, are sure to fail. Without him she can do nothing. But she can do all things when he strengthens her. Acting under his direction,

her faith can remove mountains; obstacles are of no account; nothing can impede her progress or delay her triumph. What can hinder the salvation of the world, if it be Christ's right arm which is put forth to accomplish it?

IV. The text supplies us with yet another argument for the conversion of the world to God. The Israel who is here addressed and in whom God declares that he will be glorified embraces all his people in every age. We have already seen that this term may not be confined to the people of God before the appearance of Christ in the flesh to the exclusion of his people since that time, but that it embraces the Church of both dispensations, which is in reality one and the same, continued in one unbroken line of succession. Neither may we stop at any other arbitrary limit and restrict the meaning of Israel to the people of God up to that point of time and excluding those beyond it. We may not fix upon the present as our limit and say that the Israel here spoken of denotes all who have thus far yielded allegiance to the King of kings and numbered themselves among the followers of Christ. All who are yet to partake of the blessings of redemption belong to God's Israel. They lie scattered up and down among the nations in their estrangement from God, and suffering the oppression of the enemy. They are to be restored from all their dispersions, brought back to God's love and favour, and united to the commonwealth of Israel to which they properly belong. The natural descendants of the patriarchs, who have sold their birth-right and alienated themselves from their inheritance, and severed themselves from the stock of Abraham belong nevertheless prospectively to his seed. They shall one day become Jews indeed, and for this reason in spite of their excision and their blindness, they come within the scope of this sacred name of Israel. Mahommedans and pagans and those afar from God in nominally Christian lands are also for the same reason and to the same extent to be included. And thus Abraham shall be the heir of the world, the father of many nations. Israel shall

successively absorb all the families of mankind. This is the Israel contemplated by the spirit of prophecy as God's servant in whom he is to be glorified.

As surely then as God's own people shall be gathered to him, shall the world be saved. The Church goes not forth to labour upon a doubtful enterprise and in an unknown field. Her task is simply to reclaim her own scattered members. She is not to force her way amongst aliens, but to recover her sons. Everywhere God's hidden ones are found. They are strewn on every plain. They are on the mountains and in the valleys, in the heart of the continents and upon the islands of the sea. They mingle with the surging masses that crowd the streets of densely populated cities, and they occupy secluded hamlets far from the busy haunts of men. They roam with savage tribes in uncultivated wilds, and they have their settled habitation in ancient empires. They are dispersed through every zone from the burning tropics to the frozen poles. She has but to search them out and they will flock to her standard. She cannot conduct her search amiss. In every quarter she will meet and recognize her own. And thus shall be gathered that great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who shall join themselves to Israel. This is God's servant, this vast mass of redeemed ones; and in their recovery from sin and everlasting death, in their homage and obedience, in their enraptured perception of his glory, in their reflection of his glorious image, and in their exaltation to partake of his celestial bliss and glory, He shall in the highest sense be glorified.