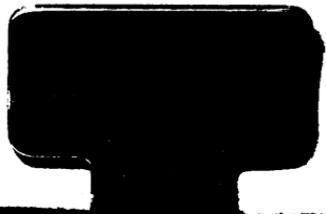

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ms. d. 107

No 9

The safe Retreat from impending Judgments.

Being the Substance of a

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

At Leeds, March 12, 1762.

Being the Day appointed by his Majesty for a
GENERAL FAST;

Purphant to

A Declaration of W A R against S P A I N.

*In the fear of the Lord is strong Confidence; and his
Children shall have a Place of Refuge. Prov.
xvii. 26.*

By JOHN EDWARDS.

L O N D O N:

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ISAIAH lv. 7.

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

IT may be accounted one of our many mercies, that we are called upon from the Throne, "To humble ourselves this day, before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon of our sins, and in the most devout manner to send up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty, for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold sins and provocations, have most justly deserved." This is a duty incumbent upon fallen creatures at all times, but especially at this awful and critical conjuncture.

Hitherto indeed it has been the happiness of these nations (and of these only) to be mercifully preserved from the common desolations of war. But who that fears the Lord, who that has even the bowels and feeling of a man, but must deeply lament and bewail the present face of affairs in Europe! How many large and fruitful provinces (not very distant from us) have been turned into a wilderness,
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and are now almost uncultivated and uninhabited, the cities depopulated and laid in ashes, the country ruined, the inhabitants slaughtered with all the wantonness of savage barbarity, without distinction of rank, sex, or age! Indeed the Lord is pleased to preserve *us* in peace in the midst of general ruin, * *We are a people saved of the Lord, compassed about as with a wall of fire.* But should we not be deeply concerned for others? and have we not reason to tremble for ourselves? for are we better, more moral or deserving, than those who have suffered such great things? Would to God it were so.—But it is to be feared that we have equalled, if not exceeded the Protestant states abroad in the practice of those evils, for which they are now visited. We, even we, † *are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, who have forsaken the Lord, and provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger.* The voice of common sense and observation confirm the royal proclamation which asserts this to be our case: and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, ‡ *That except we repent, we shall all likewise perish.*

It has been of late the general desire of the nation, as well as the ardent prayer of every good man, to see peace restored, and the devouring sword sheath'd: but if we may form a judgment from the spirit and temper of the times, from the enormous height of every kind of wickedness amongst us, we cannot but still fear, the much desired object is far from us.

There

* Zech. ii. 5.

† Isaiah i. 4.

‡ Luke xiii. 3. 5.

* *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* Surely unless the Lord appears for us, unless sovereign grace interposes, to bring us to unfeigned repentance, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to walk in newness of life, we have the greatest reason to fear, † *that all these things are but the beginning of sorrows,* that the heavy judgments our manifold sins have so justly deserved, will at length fall upon us with redoubled fury, and the whole land be devoured by the fierce jealousy of the Lord of hosts.

In this evil day, when a deluge of sin has overflowed the nation, and a deluge of wrath seems—yea, more than seems, to be near at hand, blessed are they who have made the Lord of hosts, the Holy One of Israel their timely refuge: blessed likewise are they who are happily instrumental in leading others, to secure themselves in this safe retreat.

The words of our text point to the only asylum from the impending storm. *Let the wicked,* of every rank and denomination, *for-sake his way,* the evil way he has been addicted to, and walked in with delight: *and let the unrighteous man for-sake his thoughts*—the thought of sinning with impunity, the thought of dependance upon an arm of flesh, or of obtaining salvation, without a vital union to the adorable Jesus, and an experimental knowledge of his righteousness, strength, and grace; *and let him return unto the Lord,* from whom he hath so deeply revolted, and *to our God,* our

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* *Isaiab* lvii. 21.† *Matth.* xxiv. 8.

Profane world. * *My Sabbath you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord that do sanctify you.* The Sabbath is the Christian's choicest day, where he gathers the first fruits of an eternal harvest, and obtains a foretaste of his everlasting rest. But alas! how is this blessed day, which God has (as it were) inclosed from common time, laid waste and prostituted to the vilest purposes! spent in the service of the devil, in the gratification of every vain and filthy lust. What thoughtless crowds are seen thronging the highways and fields, the ale-houses and taverns, visiting and rioting on the Lord's-day? † *And shall not I visit for these things saith the Lord, shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

It is a mournful truth, that we can hardly walk the street in any city, town or village, *And how often* but our ears are made to tingle, our hearts wounded and torn, by horrid oaths and curses. — This sin has brought the heavy curse of God upon whole nations; and for this unfruitful work of darkness, ‡ *our land mourneth, and the people thereof languish.* Alas! what will become of us when that dreadful threatening shall be fulfilled: — || *Every one that sweareth shall be cut off, the curse of the Lord shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof, and the stones thereof; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

And

* Ex. xxxi. 13.
|| Zech. v. 3, 4.

† Jer. v. 9.

‡ Hosea iv. 2, 3.

And if we take a view of the more sober and moral part of the nation, it will perhaps afford us a stronger evidence than any we have yet produced; that our land is filled with sin, and nearly ripe for destruction.—Communion with God is the very soul of true religion, the life, health, and food, of the real Christian; and God himself has given it as the very mark of a reprobate, * *that he calls not upon the Lord, he worships him not as God*, either in the family or the closet. If this is true, how many souls and families in this kingdom are dead while they live—dead in sin, dead to God, prayerless and lifeless! I speak not only of the ignorant and profane, but of many whose ancestors were once (within a century) *burning and shining lights*, the glory of the land, adorned with every moral virtue and christian grace. They could say with the favoured apostle, † *Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*: but how very different the present generation! for the most part corrupt in their principles, and loose in their morals. Instead of reading the good word of God, instructing children and servants, and praying with their families, these have adopted dancing and cards, routs and assemblies, with every species of modern vice and folly: their practice speaks louder than words, this language to God ‡ *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*, and that scripture is awfully fulfilled, || *as it is with the people, so it is with the priests.*

Our

* Psal. xiv. 5.

† 1 John i. 3.

‡ Job xxi. 14.

|| Hosea iv. 5.

Add to these an air of Levity & Affluatation of Gaiety which runs thro' the whole. Also a selfish and contracted behavior in our dealing with one another so that not only duties of the 1st but also of the 2^d table of Gods holy Law are violated & trampled und...

Our manifold sins and provocations are highly aggravated by the abuse of abundant, peculiar, distinguishing mercies—To instance in temporal things: our island may be stiled *Eden, the garden of the Lord*, in comparison of many other countries. We are favoured with a mild climate and fruitful soil. What plenty and variety of every necessary, and every delicacy, to supply our tables, to feed, cloath, and adorn our bodies, and to make our habitations pleasant and commodious? The Lord * *hath not left himself without witness amongst us, in that he hath done us good, and given us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*—How have we been mercifully spared, when *the besom of destruction* hath swept away thousands of thousands in other nations within these few years, by earthquakes, pestilence, famine, and sword? Other nations have been terrified with the roaring of cannons, the noise of drums and trumpets, the piercing groans of dying men, the dreadful shrieks of violated women, and the unavailing cries of helpless infants; while we *have* sit in peace and security, and none are permitted to make us afraid. How greatly are we distinguished as a free people, in the full possession of our liberties and properties, under the mild and gentle government of our *native* and most gracious sovereign *George the Third*. Under him (as in times past under his royal ancestors) we are favoured with all the liberty of conscience, that a *Britain* or a *Protestant* can desire;

* *Acts* xiv. 17.

desire ; and no despotic power, or arbitrary proceedings, no deviation from law or justice, no persecution for conscience sake, have had the least countenance *from the throne.*

How wonderfully has the providence of God been displayed in our favour, during the course of the present war with *France!* The Lord has given us success in every quarter of the globe ; and the whole world ^{Land} has admired the wisdom and moderation of our ^{Generals} King, the unanimity of his councils, and of his subjects, and the intrepid behaviour of his forces ; and at this hour, tho' we are engaged in the most extensive and expensive war we were ever concerned in, the whole nation ^{Land} wears the face of plenty and joy.

Now what have been our returns for all these mercies, for so many natural advantages, peculiar privileges, and memorable victories and acquisitions? Alas! my heart chills and recoils at the reflection—The whole nation seems elated with pride and arrogance, intoxicated with the pernicious fumes of idleness and luxury : in a word, actuated by a spirit of dissipation, levity, and frenzy. While we have heard of the calamities of our neighbours, we have been busied in contriving new scenes of diversion and folly, to prevent (if possible) the giddy multitude from giving way to the least sober thought : for this our theatrical entertainments were prolonged, and every new invention applauded and encouraged. The general cry was, * *Who will shew us any good?* any new farce

* *Psalms* iv. 6.

to keep up the spirit of diffipation, and to shut out reflection. Whether we are called to laugh at our own vices, or with the celebrated *Minor*, and other impious tracts, to ridicule both the word and the works of *Jehovah*; no matter what is chosen for the subject of drollery, provided it will furnish a low jest and a loud laugh; any thing will go readily down in this degenerate age. * *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?* let reason and conscience say, if such a conduct as this is a suitable return to the Lord for all his benefits.

Our gospel privileges are inexpressibly great and valuable beyond all others, and in this point we have been still more remarkably distinguished than in temporal mercies. Oh, how have we been always favoured, and especially how are we at this time favoured, † *with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, shining upon us in the face of Jesus Christ!* Surely ‡ *he hath not dealt so (in all respects) with any nation.* The gospel of God our Saviour is the visible token of *Jehovah's* presence, the glory and excellency of a people, and their best security, when it is thankfully entertained; but alas! our abuse of this mercy, of this blessing of blessings, is still more flagrant than all our other crying abominations. Have we not loathed this light bread? in every revival of vital godliness; have || *we not mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and misused his prophets!* And have we not the justest grounds

* *Deut. xxxii. 6.* † *2 Cor. iv. 6.* ‡ *Psalms. cxlvii. 20.*
 || *2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.*

grounds of fear, that on this account at least; if for no other, *the wrath of God will soon arise against us, and there will be no remedy.*

So much for the first point—Let us consider, *Secondly*, The reasons we have to fear, that the Lord will shortly visit us for these things.

Do we not hereby take up arms against the living God? Is not this in effect saying with the professors of old, who opposed the weeping prophet—* *As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee, but we will do whatsoever thing proceedeth out of our own mouth;*—and can we reasonably expect, that the holy and just God will view such an insolent conduct with indifference, and suffer us to add iniquity to sin with impunity? No, saith the Lord, † *If ye will walk contrary to me, I also will walk contrary to you, and I will chastise you seven times more for your sins;* and are we a match for the Almighty? *Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? Can we thunder with a voice like his? ‡ O, it is a fearful thing to fall, as an enemy, into the hands of the living God?* Whatever pleasures such abominations may promise for a moment, *the end of these things is misery and death.*

How hath the Lord dealt with other states and communities in similar cases? Where are all the proud monarchs and monarchies, re-

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corded

* *Jeremiab* xlv. 16, 17.
† *Heb.* x. 31.

‡ *Lev.* xxvi. 27.

corded in ancient history? the *Chaldeans*, the *Medes*, and *Persians*, the *Greeks* and *Romans*? These were each in their turn raised to the height of glory, power, and renown: but sin, the very sin under which *Britain* groans and totters at this juncture, in a little time occasioned their destruction! They once said in their hearts (as we may now) * *I shall be a lady for ever*; but the Lord *humbled their high looks*, and laid them in the dust for an Astonishment, † *and an hissing, and perpetual desolation*.

Consider how the Lord dealt with his own people the *Jews*, who by many valuable privileges were distinguished from all the nations of the earth. How often, and how severely were they visited for the abuse of these privileges, and for their murmurings, revoltings, and disobedience? they were chastised with famine, pestilence, and sword, till at length they ‡ *hung their harps upon the willows, and wept by the rivers of Babylon* for seventy years, captives in a strange land. Neither did their captivity amend them, they still continued a disobedient and gainfaying people: they stoned the prophets, they rejected the Lord of life and glory, they persecuted his apostles and followers, till at length the measure of their iniquity was filled up, and then wrath came upon them to the uttermost. According to the awful predictions of our blessed Lord, the holy city and temple were burnt, their civil and ecclesiastical polity totally destroyed, the whole nation rooted out from the land, and the few who

* *Isa.* xlvii. 7.† *Jer.* xxv. 9.‡ *Psal.* cxxxvii. 1, 2.

who escaped the sword of the *Romans*, are dispersed and pursued by the vengeance of God unto this day.

Hereafter when the Son of Man shall appear in his glory, to judge all mankind at his tremendous bar, every individual must give an account, each for himself, of the deeds done in the body. In that day the Lord will vindicate and illustrate before men, angels, and devils, the harmony and honour of all his divine perfections, in the full, free, and final salvation of his people, thro' the blood and righteousness of our exalted Jesus: as also in adjudging the wicked, to eternal torment, for their sins and impenitence. But political communities are in their own nature purely temporal, and exist only in this world: therefore national sins, if persisted in, must be punished with national and visible punishments. And this the Lord will surely do, for the honour of his holy name and word, to stop the mouths of blasphemers, and to convince the world that ** he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. The unalterable rule of his providence with communities, is clearly manifested both in his *word* and in his *works*. In his word he declares, *† at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, to build and to plant it, if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice; then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them. ‡ I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, and break down the wall*

* Hab. i. 13.

† Jer. xviii. 9, 10.

‡ *Isaiab* iii. 5.

wall thereof—I will lay it utterly waste, it shall not be pruned nor digged—I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. These threatnings were signally accomplished upon Jerusalem, and have been awfully confirmed by the history of every age and country.

And has not the Lord a controversy with Britain also? Do we not sin against the clearest conviction? Do not the voice of conscience, the word and providence of God, stand like cherubims with a flaming sword to deter us? and yet we are rushing madly upon ruin and destruction. We who are favoured with so many inestimable privileges, cannot sin so cheaply as other nations. We are of those, * *who know to do good, but do it not*, and therefore may justly expect to be *beaten with many stripes, and to receive the greater condemnation.*

Think not an arm of flesh can deliver us, that our fleets or armies can shield us from the anger of God. † *Cursed is the man that putteth his trust in an arm of flesh.* To depart from God, and depend upon creatures is vile idolatry. ‡ *When Ephraim spake trembling, was diffident and humble, he exalted himself in Israel, the Lord gave him success; but when he offended in Baal he died.* To depend upon warriors and patriots for safety, is no less vain and impious, than with those of old to cry out, *O Baal, save us*—for whatever we confide in, is properly our idol, and will provoke the Lord sooner or later to blast our vain hopes. Some perhaps think themselves clear of this charge—
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* Luke xii. 17.

† Jer. xvii. 5.

‡ Hof. xiii. 1.

they meddle not with public affairs, but have the spirit of Gallio, *who cared for none of these things*. But have you not an idol in secret? do you indulge no easy-befetting sin, no fraud, adultery, envy, or malice, no omission of known duty? Is there nothing of which you say in your heart, * *My power, and the might of my hand hath gotten me this?* Hear the word of the Lord, † *Cursed be the man that makes an idol, and putteth it in a secret place*. It is all one whether it be in the chest or the shop, in the barn or the house, in the closet, the study, or the heart. A secret idol will expose you to an open curse, and they that are cursed of God shall be cut off. Or will you say I am free from this charge likewise, *I pray, fast, and give alms*—It is so far well, and yet this, if it goes no farther, will leave you without excuse. Vital religion is at a very low ebb amongst us, and the form of godliness without the power is of no value. Men may confess their sins without real sorrow, may say their prayers without true devotion, and hear the word without living faith or fervent love; and all such services *are an abomination to the Lord*. To such persons the Lord of Hosts saith, † *I have no pleasure in you, neither will I accept of an offering at your hand*. Let me ask—have you a deep sense of your lost state by nature? has the holy and just law of God been brought home to your consciences, in its spiritual nature and extent? are you convinced, that

* Deut. viii. 17.

† Deut. xxvii. 18.

‡ Mal. i. 10.

that * *all our own righteousnesses are no better than filthy rags?* And do you in every act of worship draw near to God, relying only on the efficacious blood and perfect righteousness of our exalted Jesus? if not—give me leave to assure you, that you are to this day strangers to that inward spiritual worship which God requireth. Your prayers and devotions are no better than the superstitious worship of the Athenians, who had altars and inscriptions, † *To the unknown God.* And the Lord hath declared to such worshippers as you, ‡ *I hate, I despise your solemn assemblies, and your fast days: for it is a people that have no understanding, therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.*

I proceed to consider the third point proposed, The sure and only retreat from the impending danger, pointed out in the gracious invitation and promise in our text, *Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

To return, supposes a deep sense of our revolt and danger. We shall not think of returning to the Lord, till we are truly affected with the distance and separation which our sins have made, and the evils which on this account we have justly deserved. This has been the method of grace from the beginning, both with individuals and nations. The first ray of mercy that beamed upon fallen Adam, found

* *Isaiah* lxiv. 6. † *Acts* xvii. 23. ‡ *Isaiah* xxvii. 11.

apostle's discourse, of their sin and danger, they were pricked in their hearts, and earnestly cried out, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

This method, in which our wise Redeemer always carries on his purposes of grace and love, by humbling and wounding those whom he designs to heal and exalt, does evidently tend most to the glory of God, is most suitable to the nature of man, and most conducive to the general good of his people.

1. It tends most to the glory of God. A convinced sinner no longer ** glories in himself, and in the work of his own hands*; thus all *boasting is excluded*, pride and self-confidence abated, and the praise ascribed to the Lord alone; and the riches of divine mercy and grace are illustrated, by the sinner's free confession of his unworthiness and misery. Thus he dealt with his people; he delivered them from Egypt, he led them thro' the sea, he fed them in the wilderness, he brought them back from Babylon, but not till they were sorely pressed by their enemies; convinced of their own insufficiency, bewailed their sins, and were cut off from every hope and help but in the Lord alone. In like manner to the distressed, the mourners, and broken-hearted, Christ is sent, and to those only he is welcome. For,

2. It is most suitable to the nature of man. Fallen man is averse to the saving grace of God: He is naturally devoted to sin, self, and the creature, and will never go to Christ for happiness, until he is weary of these miserable com-

* *Hof. xiv. 3.*

comforters. Hence arises the necessity of seeing and *feeling* the exceeding sinfulness of sin; * *For the Lord draws with the cords of love, as with the bands of a man*—not by forcing our wills, but by enlightening our understandings, shewing us what *we are*, and what *he is*: He makes us *willing in the day of his power* †, but as none will pant for the refreshing stream but the thirsty soul; none send for the physician *but those that are sick*; so none but the burthened, lost, and guilty sinner, will seek to Jesus the Saviour for life and peace. Tho' some, from a general view of the gospel, seem ready to accept of Christ and his crown; yet if they have not known the bitterness of sin, they will not embrace Christ and his cross: ‡ They speak fair, like the young man in the gospel, but in a time of trial, go back as he did; because, for want of knowing the evil of sin, they know not the absolute need of such a Saviour.

3. It is most conducive to the good of the Lord's people. It gives them a more endearing knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus—as it is said, || *The sleep of the labouring man is sweet*, so is the *rest* of a labouring soul. The more sin is felt, the more Christ is desired, and the stronger the desire after him, the stronger and fuller will be the delight, when it is obtained.

It is a powerful remedy against the love of the world. To a soul truly humbled the world

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* *Hos. xi. 5.*
|| *Eccles. v. 12.*

† *Psalms 110.*

‡ *Matt. xix. 22.*

appears meer pageantry, vanity, and vexation of spirit—Such a one reasons thus; when I was once distressed with guilt, when wrath hung over me, and hell gaped to receive me, then I saw and experienced, that neither the profits, pleasures, or friendship of the world, could give me a moment's ease; nothing but Christ could afford me relief then, and nothing but Christ can satisfy me now. *He is my beloved, and he is my friend*—who manifested his love to me, and shewed himself a friend indeed in the day of my distress.

In a word, it is of constant use in their whole progress in well-doing. Where the building is intended to be large and lofty, the foundation must be laid deep in proportion: And thus the foundation of the spiritual building, the work of God in the heart, which is designed to be raised high as heaven, and to last for ever, is laid in deep humiliation. This causes a constant hatred and aversion to sin for the future; as the burnt child dreads the fire, so the soul that hath been thus searched, by the apprehension of deserved wrath, is taught to fear and fly from the very appearance of that accursed thing which God hateth, by * *the remembrance of the gall and wormwood*, of its former state: For the want of this, many who seem to begin well soon fall away, like the seed which withered soon after it sprung up, † *because it had no depth of earth*.

If this is the constant order of the holy Spirit, to act first as a spirit of bondage, and afterwards

‡ Lam. iii.

† Matt. xiii. 4—6.

terwards as a spirit of adoption. When he influences sinners to return unto the Lord, it is highly proper for each of us to examine and prove our own selves by the word of God. Have you (my friends) been led in this way? Has the spirit of bondage ever seized upon your hearts? I can tell you, (and I would speak it to the praise of the tender mercies of my God) that this was my case for five successive years. I well remember when the law of God, an awakened conscience, and the fiery darts of Satan, wrote bitter things against me; and when I would have given a thousand worlds for one cheering beam of the Sun of Righteousness. And whatever little I have received of the Lord, either of gifts or grace, for his service in the ministry, I was taught it in this school, and by these thorns: And tho' I would not altogether propose my own experience as a standard for others, yet knowing * *the terrors*, and the superabundant mercy of *the Lord*, I would persuade men. You cannot be wholly ignorant of these things, if † *so be that you have tasted the Lord is gracious*. What then is the answer of your hearts? Have you a spiritual and scriptural experience of this conviction of sin? Is Jesus Christ, the most precious, excellent, and desirable object in your esteem? If so the serpent's head is bruised, his snare is broken. In such a disposition as this, a man will freely and cordially *return unto the Lord*: He will renounce and abhor whatever offers to stand in competition with Jesus; and tho'

* 2 Cor. v. 11. † 1 Pet. ii. 3.

tho' he continues diligent in the use of all appointed means; yet he rests not in them, he passes thro' them all, as the right way of *returning to the Lord*, and fixes his dependance upon Him alone. It is indeed a blessing to society when an outward reformation takes place, when men refrain from drunkenness, profaneness, and gross immorality: But the believer, tho' he mourns for these things, avoids them himself, and trembles for the nation in which all kinds of wickedness are suffered to abound with impunity, yet he cannot rest here, he cannot content himself with a partial return, with being changed from a publican to a pharisee. He sees so much infirmity and sin cleaving to all his thoughts, words, and actions, that he can make no account of his best performances, but simply returns unto the Lord, to pardon his offences, to heal his diseases, to supply his wants, and to conquer his enemies. The constant language of scripture is the genuine language of his heart. * *In vain is salvation sought from the bills, only in the Lord our God is the salvation of his people.* † *In the Lord I have righteousness and strength.* ‡ *Take away iniquity, and receive us graciously. Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more unto the works of our hands, ye are our gods—*In a word, to return unto the Lord, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, are terms of the same import. The guilty trembling sinner, while he apprehends himself pursued by di-
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* Jer. iii. 23. † Psalms xiv. 24. ‡ Hab. xiv. 3.

vine justice, cursed by the law, and condemned in his own conscience, is enabled by the Spirit of God, ^a *to behold the Lord Jesus Christ as evidently crucified before him.* He views him by faith as hanging upon the cross, bleeding, groaning, dying, not only for our good, ^b *but for our transgressions,* and in our stead. He is now assured that ^c *the sword of divine justice,* which he saw *awaked* against himself, ^d is sheathed and drenched in the bowels of a Redeemer: he sees that *the holy, just, and fiery law,* which denounced such dreadful curses against him for sin, is fulfilled, ^e *magnified,* and made honourable by the perfect obedience and meritorious sufferings of the blessed Jesus. He sees this glorious righteousness of the surety, ^f *imputed* of God, to himself, and is hereby enabled to rest his soul upon this ^g *chosen, tried, precious, and sure foundation.* He appropriates all that Christ has done and suffered to his own use. He cries out with joy and rapture, ^h *He has loved me, and given himself for me; i* *he is my Lord, and my God.*

And O with what peace, and love, and wonder, does one who has thus ^k *received the atonement,* read over the history and the mystery of the Saviour's humiliation! his birth, life, miracles, sufferings, and death; and the glorious account of his resurrection, ascension, session, and intercession! Every bough of the tree of life, both on this side, and the other side

^a Gal. iii. 1.

^d Rom. vii. 12.

^e Isaiah xxviii. 16.

^k Rom. v. 11.

^b Isaiah liii. 5.

^c Isaiah xlii. 21.

^h Gal. ii. 20.

^c Zac. xiii. 7.

^f Rom. iv. 22.

ⁱ John xx. 28.

side the river, yields to the believer's hand, a rich variety of delicious ^a fruit; and the leaves thereof heal his every wound, and every disease. Wonder not therefore, my friends, that having myself tasted how good the Lord is, I should be so importunate and pressing with you, to return to him likewise: *Return to the Lord, for he will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon.*

Is any one ready to ask; but how can I be assured that he will receive so vile a wretch as me? These words of our text are full to the print; ^b *he will have mercy, he will pardon.* The words are doubled, because they are sure; but for your farther comfort and encouragement, consider our Saviour's merciful nature: ^c *He is the only begotten Son of the Father of mercies*: he is ^d *the express image of the father's person*. ^e *God is love*, and Jesus is love; a God of love, clothed with flesh and blood—manifesting himself to us, in the most tender familiar manner, to forbid our fears, and to animate our hope; so that altho' we have a ^f *great high priest over the house of God*; one who thinks it no robbery to be equal with God, ^g *yet he is merciful and compassionate*, beyond expression, even to the ignorant, and those who are out of the way. Hence he is emphatically stiled ^h *the Lamb of God*. He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He has been in all points tempted like unto us, tho' without sin,

^a Rev. xxii. 1.
² Cor. i. 3.
^f Heb. iv. 14.

^b Gen. xli. 42.
^d Heb. iv. 3.
^g Phil. ii. 6.

^c John i. 14.
^e John iv. 8.
^h John i. 29.

sin, and *therefore is able and willing* to succour us, and hence the apostle encourages the weakest and the vilest, to * *come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Consider how tenderly and readily Jesus healed the bodily diseases of all who came to him while he was upon earth. Have you heard or read of any poor helpless creature that sought to him for mercy, and was refused? Not one, And can you think him altered since? Far be it from us to think, that he who shewed such compassion to the bodies of all wherever he came, will now suffer a penitent praying soul to perish at his feet. No, he never did, he never will: rather, he is still calling those who otherwise would never have thought of coming to him, as he formerly called Matthew from the receipt of custom, Simon and Andrew from their nets, Zaccheus out of the Sycamore-tree, and publicans and sinners from every quarter; † *for he is come to seek, and to save that which was lost.*

Consider the gracious appointment of his ordinances; he has left us his word, he continues to send forth his ministers, he has promised the presence and power of his Spirit to accompany their labours; and all for this end, that dead sinners may be awakened, and mourning sinners comforted.

Consider his kind and gracious invitations to poor trembling souls. When he once had declared the fulness of his power and commission,

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• *Heb. iv. 15, 16.*

† *Luke xix. 10.*

that all things *were delivered into his hands* : and that as Mediator, the entire administration of the covenant of grace was committed to him; he immediately adds, * *Come unto me ye that labour and are heavyladen, and I will give you rest.* And elsewhere, † *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* And now he is exalted to the throne of glory, his heart is still the same: his endearing invitations, are as full of compassion and grace as before. How affecting, how kind, how comfortable are his last words, with which he closes his last revelation! *I Jesus have sent my angel to testify these things unto the churches*—as worthy their peculiar attention ‡ *The spirit and the bride, say come; and let him that heareth, say come; and let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him taste of the water of life freely.*

To these considerations, I might add—the experience of real christians in all ages, the whole church militant upon earth, and the countless myriads in glory, who have *washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*, are so many witnesses of his truth, and eternal monuments of his abundant mercy. Those who are now in heaven were once on earth as we are, subject to the same infirmities, beset by the same enemies, perplexed with the same fears and doubts—but they || *were made more than conquerors through him that loved them*—and now they are *before the throne, proclaiming his praise,* and

* Matt. xi. 27, 28.

† Rev. xxii. 16, 17.

‡ John vii. 37.—vi. 37.

|| Rom. viii.

and * *saying with a loud voice, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing; for he hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father for ever: so that you see the matchless love, and meritorious blood of our adorable Saviour, are the grand subjects of the songs of heaven. May the Lord give you a right understanding of these things, and you will no longer question his willingness to receive the chief of sinners, who humbly seek to him alone for pardon and acceptance.*

I shall conclude with a word of application.

1. To the ungodly ignorant sinner: too many such, it is to be feared, there are in this numerous assembly. Alas, poor sinful souls, what a miserable case are you in! your situation is more deplorable than that of a man sleeping on the brink of a dreadful precipice, a terror to all who see him, lest the next moment he should fall and be dashed to pieces; yet he, poor wretch, sleeps on regardless of his danger. When I consider the weight of these words, EVERLASTING glory, and EVERLASTING torment, and that a few uncertain moments will unalterably fix every soul here present in the *one* or the *other*, the thought overpowers me, and I feel the want of words to express myself, as I ought. † *Oh! who amongst us shall dwell with devouring fire; who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*

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* Rev. v. 12. i. 5.

† *Isaiab xxxiii. 12.*

ings? I have a message from God to you sinners, a message of the utmost importance—It is this—*Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord—let him do it speedily, yea now; to-day, while it is called to-day, lest the Lord swear in his wrath they shall not enter into his rest.* Let him not only do it for one day, at such a time as this, a day of occasional humiliation; but once for all, *let him return unto the Lord*; let him return unto the Lord with a settled purpose to forsake him no more, so as to say upon every future temptation, * *I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back.* I know assuredly, that I am now addressing those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and perhaps some may hear me with a contemptuous smile: but is not this a death which is capable of spiritual life? Is it a thing incredible with any of you, that God should raise the dead? or that the holy Spirit can breathe upon these dry bones that they may live? and does not the Lord usually operate in this great concern by means and instruments! If it was not so, I might as well preach to beasts as to men: but my soul well remembers when it was in your helpless miserable state, and how it was recovered; and I trust there are some hundreds in this assembly who can witness with me, that they were *once dead, and are alive again*, and that it was by this foolishness of preaching, the Lord brought them to the knowledge of his salvation.

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* Judges xi. 35.

I would therefore renew my address—O that I knew how to engage you to forsake your sins, and return to the Lord! Ah, what a wretched choice have you made! why will ye prefer vain cares, empty pleasures, or filthy lusts, * *to an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance?* O *wherefore do ye spend your money, your time and talents, † for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?* Turn ye, turn ye, *from your evil ways, for why will ye die?*—O my God! turn them, and they shall be turned; draw them, and they shall run after after thee.

I beseech you, by the sufferings of the Lord Jesus—O sinner, *behold the Lamb of God*—such was his love, that rather than we should be lost without remedy, he made his soul an offering for our sins. The guilt of our oaths, lies, drunkenness, uncleanness, pride, malice, and unbelief, was charged upon him. Come, sinner, and see him pressed under the immense load, in the garden covered with tears, and sweat, and blood. Hark how he prays, † *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* See him insulted, spit upon, scourged, and crowned with thorns——See the Lord of Life condemned to the painful ignominious accursed death of the cross. See him bearing his cross upon his bleeding shoulders to Golgotha, and there fastened to it by his hands and feet with iron spikes. Hear his bitter complaint, † *he cried with a loud voice, my God,*

† *1 Pet. i. 4.* † *Isaiah lv. 1.* † *Matt. xxvi. 42.*
 † *Matt. xxvii. 51.*

God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? The earth heard this and trembled, the rocks were rent, the graves thrown open, and the Heavens withdrew their light—Ah sinner, is thy heart harder than rocks and stones! Was all nature alarmed at this amazing scene, and art thou quite insensible? What, did the Lord Jesus endure such torments of body, such horrors of soul! and wilt thou still go on in sin! wilt thou trample upon his blood, and crucify him afresh! O be ashamed of this ingratitude, repent, return unto the Lord, so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

Methinks I can read some concern in your countenances. Methinks some of you are ready to say, O that I could return!—this is the desire of my soul. But alas, I have not the marks of the people of God, I want that poverty of spirit, that fervent love, that spirit of prayer which the scripture speaks of, and which believing souls possess.

I answer, it is true the Lord does require these things of all his people, but not as terms of acceptance, not as a price in our hand to procure his favour. No, all these are gifts and graces provided freely in the everlasting covenant, bestowed on us, and wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, and are the fruits and effects of coming to Jesus; so that your having no good thing of your own, is so far from being a hindrance, that you must see and feel, that you have nothing, and are nothing but sin, before you either can or will come to Jesus for salvation. I would advise you in the words of
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the disciples to the blind man, ^a *Be of good comfort, rise, the master calleth thee*—Go directly, fall prostrate at his throne of grace, confess your iniquities and sins, tell him all your complaints, dangers and fears, and humbly implore his mercy. Be not afraid; Jesus will stretch forth the golden sceptre, and display the banner of free sovereign grace. ^b *He will clothe you with change of raiment,* ^c *bring you into his banqueting-house,* and feast you with ^d *the bread of life, the bidden manna,* and the wine of paradise. He will say unto you, ^e *Son, all that I have is thine,* ^f *I am thy shield, thy portion, and thy exceeding great reward.*

In this way, by humbling yourselves before the Lord, till you obtain an experience of his mercy and grace; if you cannot save a guilty land from judgments, you will save your souls, and perhaps you may save your lives likewise in the day of vengeance. When Ezekiel saw, in a vision the destroying angels at the gate of Jerusalem, waiting for a command to slay utterly old and young without mercy, he saw likewise and beheld the Angel of the Covenant set a mark on the foreheads of those ^g *who sigh and mourn for all the abominations that are done in the midst of her.* And the destroyers were expressly enjoined not to come near any upon whom is the mark. Therefore whatever you do, ^h *seek righteousness, it may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's fierce anger.*

But

^a Mark x. 49.

^b Zech. iii. 4.

^c Cant. ii. 4.

^d Rev. ii. 17.

^e Luke xv. 31.

^f Gen. xvii. 1.

^g Ezek. ix. 1—6.

^h Zeph. ii. 3.

But who can say?—perhaps the conversion of a small remnant may tend to the preservation of the whole community. A few praying believing souls may help to fill up the dreadful breach, and stop the overflowing scourge from breaking in upon a sinful land. Our gracious God would have spared wicked Sodom, even for ten righteous men. * He would have spared Jerusalem for a single Person.—† *Run ye to and fro, and see now if ye can find a man that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.* Let every one therefore, who is desirous to promote the peace and happiness of his country, begin at home, first with his own heart, then with his house, and from thence let his light shine upon all around him, till *the little leaven shall spread through the whole land.* The Lord grant it may be so with each of us.

But without this personal and cordial surrender of ourselves unto the Lord, it will avail little to complain of the abominations that fill our land, or to preach to others while we ourselves are still in our sins, ‡ *alienated from the life of God, and strangers to the covenants of promise.* First, says our Lord, || *cast out the beam out of thine own eye,* and then thou shalt see clearly to open the eyes, and correct the faults of others; or else what answer can we make to that close alarming question of the apostle? § *Thou that teachest others, teachest thou not thyself?* Let me sum up all with,

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* Gen. xviii.
|| Matt. vii. 3.

† Jer. v. 2.

‡ Epl'es. iv. 18—ii. 12.

§ Rom. ii. 21.

2. A word of advice to the people of God. My dear friends, bear it ever on your minds, that what you are, and have, more than others, is not of merit on your part, but the effect of free sovereign distinguishing grace; I beseech you therefore, ** let all bitterness, wrath, clamor, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be you kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.* This happy spirit becomes us at all times, but especially now, when the judgments of God are so awfully abroad in the earth. *Let us hear the rod and him that hath appointed it.* Every trouble, whether outward or inward, all that we hear of, and all that we feel, is designed to subdue our spirits, to purify us from envy, bigotry, and every hateful temper, from the love of a vain world, from self-dependence, and self-seeking, and to quicken our progress and affections towards heavenly things. And unless these ends are answered, unless a spirit of humility, wisdom, zeal, unanimity, and love: in a word, unless the power of true evangelical piety is cultivated and prevails, we cannot well expect but that *these things are the beginning of sorrows*; therefore let us likewise return unto the Lord, lament our past backslidings, and resolve in his strength to cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, and we shall find † *his name a strong tower of defence; then we need not be afraid of any evil-tidings, yea tho' the earth should be moved, and the mountains cast into the*
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* *Ephes. iv. 31, 32.*

† *Psalms cxii. 7.*

*midst of the sea: for the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and our friend, who exercises all power in heaven and in earth, shall be unto us * a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of waters in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land; † for the Lord hath pleasure in his people, and will beautify the meek with salvation.*

* *Isaiah xxxii. 2.*

† *Psalms cxlix. 4.*

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