

HOW TO GO FORWARD

A SERMON

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“So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward.” Ezekiel 39:22

THEN if he be our God from the day he begins to bless and forward, it implies that we are to look forward. And it is one of the most pleasant things to be brought into that promise into which our father Abraham was brought; and in the light, and life, and certainty of that promise he could look forward to a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God; and into that city he is now come. Therefore, it is exceedingly pleasant to be favored to look forward in the light of God's promise, that will accompany us all through the wilderness, and through Jordan, and will remain in all its amplitude and blessedness with us to all eternity; to look forward in the light of God's everlasting love; “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore in loving-kindness have I drawn you:” and the time will never arrive when his love is not the same. It will imply that we are not only to *look* forward, but also to *go* forward; and we are to go forward by the salvation of God. Hence, when the Israelites were by the sea side, crying to the Lord, the Lord was about to make a way for them by his power to go forward; “Why,” said the Lord, “cry you unto me? speak to the people that they go forward.” And then the rod, the symbol of power, being stretched out over the sea, a way was made, and they went forward. And so, it is now; whatever seas may roll between us and the promised land, the blessed God will divide them; he will make a way for us to go forward; so that we find that let what may be in the way, God will give us the victory from time to time, leading us forth conquering and to conquer, until we shall appear before God in Zion. Yea, we are to *press* forward; not only to *look* forward and *go* forward, but *press* forward, forgetting those things that are behind. And what are those things? Why, in the first place all our sins; God has cast them behind his back; so, we shall forget them in one sense of the word; for if the enemy can get us to be perpetually looking back at our sins, he will wonderfully retard us in our race; this unbelief, this Pharisaism, that is everlastingly besetting us, the sin that so easily besets us, still comes in, and calls our attention to those sins that the everlasting God has thrown behind his back, to those sins which an Almighty Savior has atoned for and put eternally away, to those sins that are blotted out; and Satan will say, what is the good of your pressing forward? and so we make a kind of halt; just as though our sins were more mighty to destroy than Christ is to save: just as though our guilt was unmanageable by an Almighty and an eternal God. Therefore, when we can see our sins thus cast behind the back of Jehovah, we have nothing to do but to press forward; and

the farther we press forward to the promised rest, the farther we go as it were from where our sins are; "As far as the east is distant from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." We are to leave the world behind us, self-righteousness and the world's religion behind us; lay aside every load, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The part of our text, therefore, that I have to notice this morning is exceedingly encouraging. "So, the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward." I cannot think of anything more pleasant than to have something to press forward to with full assurance that we shall not be disappointed. It was this that inspired the blessed Redeemer himself with pleasure and delight; "For the joy that was set before him." But then it is also a matter of essential importance to know that we are pressing forward rightly, that we are walking in the right path, that we are running the right race; because if we are wrong in this, we shall have to come back again. The foolish virgins went forward, but they had to go back again; the man with one talent went forward, but he had to go back again; the man without the wedding garment went forward, but he had to go back again; and the murmurers in the vineyard, the penny a day laborer's, they went forward, and were very early in going forward, but they had to go back again. There is therefore, great solemnity in that exhortation of the apostle Peter, when he says, "Brethren, give all diligence to make your calling sure;" try yourselves by the word of God, and make sure that your call is not a mere conscience call; for there are many called in that sense; it is only those that are savingly called, called by grace, that are chosen; "many are called, but few are chosen." And then when you have made your calling sure, and it stands pretty clear to you that the good work is begun in your heart, in whatever way that work may be manifested to you or to others, whether instantaneously or gradually; when you have made that department pretty sure, then you will have another department to look to, and that is your election. If you can once prove that you are called that is a proof of your election. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called." Therefore, your calling will prove your ordination to eternal life, will prove your election of God, will prove that you are in the bond of the covenant; that this God is your God from this day and forward, and will be your God for ever and ever, and your guide unto death. Therefore, make your choice of God's truth sure; make a sure choice of it, not a careless choice. We find in the parable of the sower there are four classes, but only one class that were profitable hearers, good ground hearers. The Savior does not say, take heed *where* you hear; but "Take heed *how* you hear." Thus, you will see that I have this morning to be very careful in describing what this going forward is; for if the Lord, be our God from this day and forward, it implies that we are to press forward in that path which leads to everlasting life. Observe then, friends, how important is the question as to whether we are pressing forward in the right way or not. Hence, that Scripture where it is said, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in there at; but strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it." I shall therefore, this morning try to describe to you what you must take with you, or by what you must go forward, if you go forward rightly. It must in the first place, be a deep and a settled conviction in your souls of *the fatal evil of apostacy*. That is the first thing you must carry with you; and if you have not that with you, you are somehow or another not as yet in the right road; and if you are not in the right road, you will have to go back again, or perhaps be cast out for ever, no, you must be cast out for ever if you are not found at last in the right road. And, then, secondly, I shall want you to have *the testimony of God's mercy*; take that with you. Thirdly, I shall want you to take with you *the substitutional work*

of Christ; fourthly, the Lord alone; fifthly, the completeness of the Savior's work. Now these five things are all suggested in connection with our text; and that is the reason why I have laid out my subject in this way.

First: First, then, we must carry with us a conviction of the fatal evil of apostacy. Now this appears to be a very important matter; for the Lord reminds us in connection with our text, of the cause of the house of Israel going into captivity; that "the heathen shall know," meaning I apprehend the Gentiles, "that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they trespassed against me;" the Gentiles shall learn from the apostacy of my national people, as well as from their own hearts, and their apostacy in the first Adam, they shall learn from that the fatal effects of apostacy. And whenever that conviction becomes fixed and fastened in the mind, it is a wonderful preservative; it keeps us out of the wrong way; it keeps us in the midst of the path of righteousness; namely, the righteousness of faith; for we walk by faith. Now, "they went away into captivity for their iniquity; because they trespassed against me, therefore, hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies; so, fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them." Let us then look a little closely into this matter; and we have a two-fold apostacy to instruct us in this department; first our apostacy from God in the first Adam; secondly, the apostacy of the Jews. Let us see how their apostacy began; let us look at it, and see whether we ourselves are so brought to know the truth as to see that there can be no life, nor hope, nor help, anywhere but in that truth. Go to the 19th chapter of the 1st Book of Kings; why, if I had time in one sermon, I might run all through the 11th of Romans, and show how beautifully the apostle in that chapter explains, very much to our instruction and advantage, and to the glory of that grace by which we are saved, that beautiful chapter, the 19th of 1st Kings. Let us run through the description of their apostacy there; when the Lord appeared to Elijah, and said, "What do you here, Elijah?" the prophet expressed a good feeling; he said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts," But that has passed away now; that has become unfashionable now; you must not say anything about jealousy, for his name now; oh no, the truth is getting very much out of fashion but bless the Lord, it cannot get out of fashion with his own people. Well, the prophet goes on to describe this apostacy, "The children of Israel have forsaken your covenant;" that is the first step. Now what was the first item of that covenant? The first item of it was, "You shall have no other gods but me; you shall not make unto you any graven image;" they were to abide by the true God in contrast to all other gods; and he established a certain order of things; and they forsook that covenant; that is the first step. Just see how beautifully we are brought to feel our need of "a covenant ordered in all things and sure;" and to feel ourselves so lost and helpless before God, that we can be saved in no other way but by that covenant which is described in the 55th of Isaiah; "I will make an everlasting covenant with you even the sure mercies of David;" every item of that covenant being mercy. And if we are brought to feel our need of that, I am sure we feel deeply the awfulness of apostacy from it, we shall grow in our conviction of our need of such a covenant. If there is one item of the covenant that is not mercy, then it cannot save us; for in every department we need mercy. What say you; Do you feel that, the Lord keeping you, you would part with anything and everything, together with mortal life, rather than part with the great truth of God's covenant? Unless you see the necessity of abiding by this, and the fatal evil of apostatizing from this, you are not yet brought in at that straight gate, nor brought into that narrow way, that leads unto eternal life; and you will by and bye prove yourself to be a mere reprobate, if grace prevent not. This then is the first step of apostacy, forsaking God's covenant. Oh, when I find ministers that some time ago seemed to enlarge a good deal upon the

promises of the New Covenant, when I find them now, avoid these promises, and dwell upon something that is more popular, it is to me a most awful sign; it is a sign of rottenness at the bottom, a sign of an undercurrent of hypocrisy. The second step in this apostacy was the throwing down of God's altars. God had two altars, the sacrificial and the intercessory; and they lowered these altars. So, if you lower the sacrifice of Christ, as is the practice almost everywhere, that is a sign of apostacy from God's covenant. Are you brought to feel, my hearer, that if the sacrifice of Christ be lowered, there can be no hope for you? Do you ask what the height of the sacrifice is? My answer is that as the sacrifices on God's altar were accepted of God, those sacrifices, therefore, in that sense were typically high as heaven. So, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ is high as heaven; and that the people who are there happily know; "You are worthy to take the book; for you were slain, and have redeemed us by your blood unto God." Would you have that sacrifice lowered? Would you have it put into such a shape and form that it would leave some uncertainty in your mind as to whether it can carry you to heaven or not? Do you feel, no, I could not have it lowered; I feel that if that be lowered, I am lowered; I feel that if there be any uncertainty there, as to whether I can be taken to heaven, I have no hope? Ah then, the Lord is your God from this day and forward. The third step of their apostacy was to slay God's prophets. Just so they do now; they do not slay them literally, with the sword; but they slay them with the tongue; caution people everywhere against them. Why, those ministers about the country and in London, who preach the truth, their names are almost everywhere offensive; and when I look over the country, and see what little congregations most good men have, I cannot help feeling grieved. I really do wish and often pray that the Lord would give them grace, and gifts, and strength to avoid some of the things by which their chapels are kept so empty. They are sometimes from twenty to twenty-five minutes, sometimes half an hour, and sometimes more than that in prayer, as though God didn't know a single thing until we told him; and the people are wearied out; and then after that comes a long, prosy sort of sermon; until people that know nothing of the truth, young people and so on, find it is so tedious that they beg and pray of their parents not to take them there again; and though the parents are determined to take them there again, yet as the children grow older, they are determined not to go. I think, therefore, that if our brethren were to avoid making the service tedious to those that know not the truth, tedious to young people, and tedious sometimes even to good people, I do think it would conduce to the welfare and increase of their congregations. And those of us that have but very humble gifts, ought to be the very last to be long in our sermons. If we had the gigantic powers of a Huntington, the moving eloquence of a Hawker, or the sweet and soothing powers of a Romaine, or the telling powers of the great Toplady, then indeed we might preach for two hours, and the people listen without being wearied; but we are but poor creatures; and if the people listen to us for three quarters of an hour, they seem weary. And hence, one who is now a deacon, told me once, that he could often see I had done my sermon before I left off. So that we ought to be careful; and I am persuaded that good men do themselves a great deal of injury by preaching in the lackadaisical, see-saw, tedious sort of way in which many do. If ministers were to preach for half an hour instead of an hour and a half, I think they would do much better. Hence, you often hear people say, I would rather go where the truth is not so fully preached, but where the service is well conducted, than go where the truth is preached in a long, dry, and tedious sermon. "*They have slain your prophets with the sword.*" I do not so much mind their slaying the Lord's prophets; but I do not like to see the prophets slay themselves; and therefore, I am trying to tell them how to keep themselves alive. But let me come back to my subject. It is a strong sign of apostacy when they slay any of the prophets of the Lord. When you reproach and revile a prophet of the Lord, it is a strong sign of apostacy; it indicates that you want to get rid of God's truth, you

want to get rid of the proclamation and the public testimony of it. But let me not dwell on the dark side; I need not do so here. I believe that no man upon the surface of the globe is favored more than I am, upon the whole with hundreds that are as sincere as people possibly can be; I do not believe in any age of the world that Christians could be sincerer than hundreds of you have proved yourselves for years to be. I need not, therefore, dwell upon the dark side, but rather let me dwell upon the bright side; and let me say that you have proved for many years that you do love the house of God, that you do love the ministry of his pure truth, that you do love the habilitation of his house, and the place where his honor dwells. I trust, then, friends, that many of us do carry with us, fixed in our minds this conviction, that to forsake God's covenant, to throw down his altars, to slay his prophets, that this must be fatal to us; and I am bold to say, that apostacy is really the only sin that can ruin a man; all others are recoverable. Hence, the apostle draws a line of distinction between the sin that is unto death, and the sin that is not unto death. There is not a just man upon all the earth that does good and sins not; but the sin of apostacy is that sin from which the people of God shall be kept; and walking with God's covenant wherever they go, God is with them in that covenant; walking with God's sacrifice, God's Christ, wherever they go, God is with them; and walking with God's prophets, and apostles, that is to say, walking with their testimonies, wherever they go, the Lord will be with them by their prophets and apostles. "So shall the house of Israel know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward." Thus, then, I attach such great importance to this experimental acquaintance with your need of the truth, this vital oneness with the truth, this determination, as the Spartan mother said, to bring the shield back or be brought back upon it; this determination, grace keeping us, not to cast away our shield, for where the shield of truth is cast, away, there is to be no rain, no dew, no fields of offering; but hold fast the truth, then there shall be rain in season, the dews of heaven shall descend upon you, and there shall be fields of offering; and you will live a life of precious faith in Christ, you will die triumphant, having been kept from the great transgression, having been kept from the great iniquity, having been kept from making yourself a member of the mystery of iniquity, and having been kept firm in the great mystery of godliness. "So, the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward." Let us look at Romans 11 upon this matter. Is it not a very lamentable thing, Paul, that they should all give up the truth in this way? What, "has God cast away his people?" Why, to be sure he has. There is that man, was a good man once; he is not so now. Ah, but that is a mistake; "He has not cast away his people which he foreknew." Ah, now you are coming to your high doctrines; "which he foreknew." "For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." He has not cast me away. "Know you not what the Scripture said of Elias; how he made intercession to God against Israel?" What is God's answer? "I have reserved unto myself seven thousand;" some are in one cave, some in another: the prophet thought they were all gone; he saw they were not among the people in public; but the Lord knew where they were. I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." "Even so then at this present time, also is there a remnant according to the election of grace." Ah then, they are united to eternal election; when a man is united to that, down go your idols; down goes Baal, down goes Dagon, down goes free-will, down goes duty-faith. There never was a man yet under heaven, rightly united to the great truth of eternal election, that it does not lay itself at the root of all fleshly pretensions, cuts up the whole, throws the man into the lap of everlasting love, and there he is nursed up, and nourished up till he becomes a full man in Christ Jesus; "and so shall he be happy forever." And, as the apostle says, "if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace." "What then? Israel has not obtained that which he sought for; but the election has obtained it, and the rest were blinded." So then, the apostacy of professors shall not hinder the

establishment of that one eternal truth, “the election hath obtained it:” and that contented the Apostle, and ought to content us; it contented Christ, contented the Almighty; his counsel stands good, his purpose shall be carried out, his promise fulfilled, and his people glorified.

Second: The second is THE MERCY OF THE LORD. “I will bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel;” no exception. And what is the way of that mercy? Jesus Christ. “My mercy,” said God, “shall be with him.” “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.” Oh, let me take this mercy with me; does a fault overtake me? Mercy swallows it up. Am I grieved? Mercy comes in and assuages my grief. Am I cast down? Mercy in due time lifts me up. Am I full of ten thousand doubts and fears? Mercy takes them away. Mercy is never out of patience; its very business is to sympathize, to commiserate, to pardon, to heal, and abide by the proper objects thereof, the poor and the needy. Take that with you. But you can only take that mercy with you in the path where it is; and that is precious faith in a precious Redeemer. The Lord help you to think more of that, and talk more of that, and dwell more upon that, than upon anything done by yourselves. I hope you can say as your own soul's feeling,

“Without your sweet mercy I could not live here;
Sin soon would reduce me to utter despair;
But through your free goodness my spirits revive,
And he that first made me still keeps me alive.”

Oh, if you are here in this mercy of Christ, there is no law against you, because this mercy is just. “Mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other;” a good-hearted kiss it is too, depend upon it. “Mercy and truth meet together; righteousness and peace,” they are twins, “kiss each other.” Well if you are brought to this mercy, and take this testimony of mercy with you, then the Lord is your God from that day and forward.

Third: Then third, I want you to take with you THE SUBSTITUTIONAL WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. “After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their own land, and none made them afraid.” Now this mercy is to come in when they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses. Let us have the explanation that the flesh gives; it is this; oh, when you have borne your shame, that is when you have done penance for all your faults and trespasses, and you have thus somewhat amended yourself, and thus somewhat atoned for your faults, then mercy will come in. That is their explanation, but what is the true explanation? Do you ask me if I have borne all my shame and all my trespasses? I answer, yes; by a Surety. If I owe ten thousand pounds, and a surety come in and pay it; a person comes to me and says, have you paid all your debts? Yes, sir, every half-penny. Why, how in the world did you do that? I thought you had not a farthing to call your own? That's true; but my surety paid it all for me. So, Christ Jesus, our Surety, paid our debt; he bore our shame, and all our trespasses; he endured the cross, not for himself, but for us, despising the shame. Therefore, when they have borne their shame, means when they are brought to the Surety; and by that Surety I have borne my shame, by that Surety I have paid my debts, I have met all law's demands; I am enabled to put everything right; that is the way to do it; and no other. Why, say you, that is settling it by Jesus Christ. So, it is, and you cannot settle it better; you cannot settle it any other way. You, that think I am wrong in this interpretation, if you were put to the shame of your sins, it must be everlasting shame, you could never terminate it; if you were brought under

the contempt of the justice of God, it must be eternal contempt. And so, it is written, "They shall come forth, some to shame and everlasting contempt." But an Almighty Savior came, took our shame, our trespasses, our iniquities; put an end to the whole; and now by him I am safe in life, or death, or judgment, or eternity.

Fourth: Then the next thing I want you to take with you is THE LORD ALONE. The Lord says, "I will be sanctified in the eyes of the heathen;" that is, the Gentiles; *sanctification* there means *standing out apart*. You are to take only the Lord; no one else. Was anybody with God the Father in election, when he set his heart upon you? No. Was any creature with Jesus Christ in the work of salvation? No. Was any creature with the Eternal Spirit of God when he quickened your soul? No. Let us take the Lord alone. The church of old recognized the Lord alone. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." The Lord stands out alone. And how this corresponds with his dealing with us, sanctifying us, and bringing us out alone, to stand alone, apart from all fleshly wisdom and fleshly props.

Fifth: Then the next thing I want you to take with you is GOD'S PRESENCE. The Lord says, "I will no more hide my face from them." This I think, means several things; first, I will never disapprove of them. I disapproved of them in the first Adam, and in themselves, in their own works; "For by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified;" but they are approved in Christ and if approved in Christ, then the approbation is entire, intense, and eternal. And then also it will mean, I will never withhold from them anything that I intend for them on the ground of any sin of theirs. In the old covenant, sin could hinder; because if the covenant were violated the path was stopped up; but here in Christ Jesus the path will never be stopped up. Here is the new covenant in contrast to the old, who can hinder him? "I will no more hide my face from them no more disapprove them, and no more shall they lose the mercy that I have for them. In the first Adam they lost everything; in the first covenant they lost everything; in the second covenant they shall lose nothing finally; for "this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, that of all he has given to Christ he should lose nothing."

And now notice the winding up. It says at the close, "I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God." What does this mean? It means that you are of one mind with him. Is it his mind to save you according to the order of his covenant? You will be of one mind with him in this. Is it his mind to save you by the sacrifice and intercession of Christ? You will be of one mind with him in this. Is it his mind to save you according to the testimony of his Spirit? You will be of one mind with him in this. Is it his mind to save you according to his mercy? You will be of one mind with him in this. Is it his mind to save and take you to glory, that he will be your God from this day and forward, by the substitution of Christ? You will be of one mind with him in this. Is it his mind never to hide his face from you again? You will be of one mind with him in this.

Here, then, the Lord appears in and by Christ Jesus, in his eternity, in his immutability, in the certainty of his promises. I have said nothing of the encouragement this gives for us to go forward; I must leave my text unfinished, though I shall not preach from it again, at least not in continuation at present; but oh, what can be more encouraging? Tomorrow the Lord will be with you, the next day he will be with you, next week he will be with you; and when you come to die, he will be with

you; when you rise from the dead, he will be with you; when you go to heaven, he will be with you. “I am their God from this day and forward:” no *if*, no *but*, no uncertainty about it.