

HEART WORK

A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning February 26th, 1860

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 2 Number 68

“And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breast-plate of Judgment upon his heart, when he goes in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.” Exodus 28:29

WE have this morning, to notice first *heart work*; second, *holy place work*; third, *memorial work*; and fourth and lastly, *continual work*.

First: Let us try and find out, then, where the heart of God especially centers, that which he is determined upon, that which his heart is set upon; and that order of things by which poor, perishing sinners are brought to set their hearts upon the blessed God. The Lord's heart is set upon his people after a new covenant order of things. My referring at the very first to a new covenant may seem perhaps to indicate to you that we are going to have a great deal of sameness just now. Well, friends, we cannot help it; we must be guided by the word of the Lord in this matter. Take then the 32nd of Jeremiah, and there you will learn after what order of things and to what end the heart of the blessed God is with his people: and wherever his heart is, we are sure the Savior's heart is also. “I and my Father are one;” and Christ delighted to do the will of God. And the Lord speaks in this way; “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good;” that is the Lord's decision. “Sin has done them all the harm that it could, and still does them all the harm that it possibly can, and will do them all the harm that it can; therefore, it needed the everlasting God in this decisive covenant in order to stop the ravages of sin, in order to put an end to the destructive power of sin; in order to stay that terrible plague, in order to ford that terrible gulf, in order to put that right which sin has so fearfully, and tremendously made wrong. “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.” Be careful here; “I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.” Who is the God from whom they shall not depart? A covenant God; not a God of men's devising, not a God represented by human systems; he makes an everlasting covenant, that he will not turn away from them, to do them good. It is a God, therefore, in an immutable covenant; it is a God in an everlasting and a positive covenant, to do them good; that is the God to whom they are to be brought; they are to be brought to know their need of him. A covenant; and you see the carrying out of that covenant is in the gift of Christ, and the work of Christ, and in the work of the Holy Spirit; and indeed all the transactions of eternal mercy. “And they shall not depart from me.” Ah, how faithful is the Holy

Spirit of God in keeping up in the souls of the saints this blessed truth. When once this great truth is unfolded of this everlasting covenant, and the soul brought into an experimental acquaintance with it, what can it be exchanged away for? what can be put into the place of such a covenant as this? Let the believer wander where he may, and be the subject, as he necessarily is, of a great many infirmities and even faults, yet he cannot give up this covenant. And now, notice, the Lord goes on; "I will rejoice over them to do them good;" he will not only do them good, but he will rejoice over them to do them good; "and I will plant them in this land assuredly," this new covenant land, "with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Here then is the heart work. "I will plant them in this land;" it does not mean an earthly Canaan, but it means that heavenly Canaan, that everlasting, that new covenant land; it means that glory that accords with this covenant; "with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Here it is, on these grounds and in this order of things, that the Lord says, and he says it effectually where he does say it; "My son, give me your heart." Let your heart be in the keeping of a covenant God, let your soul be in the keeping of a God who has made an everlasting covenant, that whoever may turn from you, whoever may forsake you, or whatever your troubles, your losses, your afflictions, your trials may be, I will not turn away; men may turn from you; and all may forsake you, I will not turn away from you; and not only not turn away from you; but I will not turn away from doing you good; I will make all your afflictions, and losses, do you good. And then notice the solemn declaration; "I will put my fear in their hearts;" it is the fear of a covenant God, a new covenant fear, a gospel fear, a living fear, a filial fear; "and they shall not depart from me." Oh, how, sweet the bond. Here then God, having loved his people, with all his heart, graciously here describes to us after what order of things his heart is with us. "I will plant them in this land," this new covenant land, this eternal kingdom, this living land, this land of light, flowing with milk and honey; this land of eternal glory; "assuredly;" there is no uncertainty about it; "with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Ah, when I look round at the gospels of men, and see in those gospels some of them a great deal of truth, yet I cannot look at those gospels and say, that I can receive them with my whole heart and my whole soul. But when I look at this gospel of the new covenant, described by the blessed God himself, I must be most dreadfully mistaken, and my heart must indeed deceive me most fearfully, if I am wrong when I say that in the presence of a heart searching God I can say concerning this order of things that with my whole heart and my whole soul will I be yours in this eternal covenant; with my whole heart and my whole soul will I be yours to be planted in this land where as a fir tree, or a myrtle tree, or whatever figure is used, I shall stand and flourish forever. "I am like," said David, a "green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." Here then was the end that the heart of the High Priest, I mean our High Priest Christ Jesus, was set upon. Aaron's object was to give the people prosperity in an earthly Canaan by atoning for their sins and pleading their cause; but God the Father's object and Christ's object is to give us life eternal, prosperity eternal, prosperity eternal in the antitypical Canaan. Here then God the Father bears us upon his heart; and if we know him we shall bear him upon our hearts also; and here in this order of things Christ bears us upon his heart, in this order of things the Blessed Spirit bears us upon his heart; and here it is we may well love God; for there is nothing but love here; every item of the covenant is a mercy item; "an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David." Then as the heart of the High Priest is with the people after covenant order, as we hinted from another scripture last Lord's day morning, so secondly the heart of God is with his people after the order of Christ's mediation. What a lovely scripture is that 42nd of Isaiah, upon this very subject; "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Now notice the words; "My servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom

my soul delights.” Do you ask why God the Father delights in Christ, do you ask why he delights in him? He delights in Christ for a reason that is of essential importance to you, for a reason that will rise into a tide of unebbing delight to your soul to all eternity; the reason assigned by the Savior himself is this; “Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” Ah, here are my children all lost, who will save them? Here are my children all under the curse who will redeem them? Here are my children all corrupted, and all under the power of darkness, who will gather them? Jesus answers, Here am I, send me; and the Savior, as I have already quoted, delighted to do the will of the blessed God. “Behold my elect, in whom my soul delights.” What do you say to this my hearer? Ah, if you are a sinner vile enough, if you are a sinner great enough, and helpless enough, and cast down enough, and burdened enough, so that you know something of groaning under the complicated corruptions of a fallen nature, if you know something of this, I am sure you will desire to delight in the same glorious High Priest as well. “He shall bring forth judgment unto the Gentiles;” in the way we hinted last Lord’s day morning when we were describing the breast-plate as a breast-plate of judgment; that while as sinners, apart from Christ, judgment stands against us, yet being brought to believe in Christ judgment is given in our favor; judged unto everlasting life. Here, then, the heart of the High Priest is in the order of this covenant. Hence his very blood, his precious blood, is said to be the blood of the everlasting covenant; and the heart of the High priest also with the heart and soul of the Father; “in whom my soul delights.” And Christ upon the same subject says, “It is my meat to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Here then, is heart work. And you may depend upon it that no poor sinner can have a religion that is a real heart religion if this be not the case. The Roman Catholic’s religion is not a real heart religion; the mere formalist’s religion is not a real heart religion; in fact, I will say this morning that no man can have a real heart religion, not in the right sense of the word, in any way but by this covenant order of things and by this mediatorial order of things, where the heart of our God is. You come before God, and look at Christ’s mediation, and if you cannot see it as freeing you entirely from all you are as a sinner, then just in proportion as you come short of that, just in the same proportion your heart comes short in love to God. But if you are led to see that there is not anything from which this work does not exempt you, in proportion as your confidence rises in the perfection of Christ’s work, just in the same proportion will your love to his blessed name abound also; “according to your faith be it unto you.” And then when you unite with this mediatorial perfection of Christ, with that covenant order of things to which I have referred, it will also endear the everlasting God. I admit that nothing but the almighty power of the Eternal Spirit can enable a poor sinner to believe that a God of infinite purity, a God of inflexible justice, a God of infinite righteousness, ever can receive such poor creatures as we are; I admit nothing but the power of the Almighty Spirit of the blessed God can enable us to believe that he will receive us. And when we look at the provision he has made, when we look at the blessed truth that he is as just as he is merciful, that he is as holy as he is loving in our salvation, I know as I have said, that it needs the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to lay hold of these things, and to give our hearts to the Lord, and to say that in these relations we do love him. Again, we come to the New Testament, and let us see where the heart of the High Priest is in the New Testament. I hope your hearts, most of you, can go with the Lord in this covenant I have spoken of; I hope it has a place in your hearts; if it has, then you have a place in that. I hope the Savior, the sinners only friend, almighty friend, true friend, immutable friend, a friend at all times, I hope he has a place in your affections, and that you love him; if so, that is a proof that you have a place in his affection; “we love him because he first loved us.” See the New Testament; let us see from only two verses, and then I will leave this part of the subject where the Savior’s heart was. He

speaks in sweet accordance with the Old Testament. Hitherto we have referred to the Old Testament; let us see now from two verses in the New Testament how nicely the dear Savior speaks of the very same subject. In John 6 he says, "This is the Father's will;" after assuring us. he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him, then we should naturally ask, what is that will; for whatever that will was, Christ delighted to do it. How clearly does the Savior set before us what that will was; "This is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me;" blessed truth; if God my Father was great enough in his love and rich enough in his grace to give me the vilest of sinners, my blood is powerful enough to redeem them. "this is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day." See how these things are connected; first they are given; secondly Christ preserves them; and third, they are raised up at the last day. What say you, my hearer? Is your heart with God in this matter, or do you hate the first item I have quoted; "this is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me;" do you say Ah, I should like it very well, but that savors of election. Well, you cannot be saved without election. Have you never read that "the election has obtained it, and the rest were handed?" Have you never read that; "if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect?" Have you never read that God especially avenges and takes care of his elect? And do you say that your heart is not altogether with the Lord in that matter, because it savors, of election? I can tell you the reason of it, the reason your heart is not altogether with him there, you do not know enough of what you are yet as a sinner; a few more tribulations, a few more temptations, or a few more stumbling's will bring to light what a poor thing of nothing you are; a poor autumnal leaf, a poor cobweb, a poor nothing; and then you, will drop into this blessed truth, and say, ah, the time was when I was blind enough to think there was something rather superfluous about that matter; but now I see that none of the truths of the gospel can have any certainty in them if they are not based upon God's good pleasure. But let us, hear a further definition of the will of God. "This is the will of him that sent me;" the Savior would not leave evidences out, he was not a mere doctrinal preacher nor did he merely preach of practice or experience, he was a teaching preacher; a thorough teaching preacher; he was not a mere proclaiming preacher, he was a really teaching preacher; he taught what true practice was; he taught what true doctrine was; and so, having laid down there the order of the will of God in relation to eternal transactions, he comes down to evidences; "This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life." Ah then, do I see the Son of God so as to see that he is the chief of ten thousand, and altogether lovely? Do I see the Son of God in that mediatorial perfection to which I have referred? Do I see the Son of God in this gospel, this covenant order of things, and does he become attractive to me? Do I thus see him, and do I thus believe on him? Mark, here is the believing on him. And I will tell you one essential truth you will be glad to believe, and bless God for, I mean connected with the sonship of Christ; namely, that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, cleanses us from all sin. Ah, if you thus see the Son of God, and believe on him, then you have everlasting life, and he will raise you up at the last day. He raised you up at the first day when you first began to sigh for mercy, to pray, and to seek the Lord; this was the work of the Lord, and he will not leave you, he will be with you all through life and through death, will take care of your dust in the grave, and will raise you up at the last day. Here then is heart work. Now what is there against such a God as this? The only thing you would bring perhaps is that I have already hinted at, that some of these things savor of election. Well, friends, if the Lord has left a part of the human race under the law, that is a matter that belongs to the unfathomable depths of his sovereignty; we cannot explain the reason why, beyond his own eternal sovereignty; and there we must leave the matter. May the Lord preserve us from

finding fault with any of his judgments, and cause us to turn in a sense from those judgments with trembling, and look to him where he may be feared, where he may be loved, where there is plenteous redemption, where there is mercy and where we may have access to him, and where he will hear, and where he will love, and where he will answer.

Second. I now come, in the next place, to THE HOLY PLACE WORK: when he went into the holy place. This holy place, must be a made place; there is no holy place for sinners until one is made for them. You are aware that the altar, the courts in the tabernacle as well as afterwards in the temple, were all dedicated by blood; there was no holy place until a holy place was made for them. Can, they make one themselves? No. Let us then look for a moment at this great truth. If I take you in God's law, which is your proper rule of judgment as a sinner, you have no holy place to stand upon; your fall in Adam, that is unholy; your own personal qualities are all unholy; your works are all unholy, go wherever you may, you have nothing to stand upon but your own defilements; unclean, unclean in every way; there is no holy place, not where we can stand, not where we can have access to God. Therefore, the holy place is made. And hence the three-fold offering presented in the 9th of Leviticus is very expressive of this, "Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them and came down from offering of the sin-offering, and the burnt-offering, and peace-offering." So, then here is a sinless place. How came there to be a sinless place for a sinner to stand upon before God? Christ's offering has taken away sin, and he himself has made a holy place; so that we come into a holy place, stand upon holy ground, and rejoice in entire freedom from sin by the sacrifice of Christ. It is in and by this sacrifice of Christ, this cleansing blood of Christ; that we are to give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness. So that the priest was in a sense to make a holy place; that is to say, that as our sin come up into the presence of God; the priest came into the presence of God, and took that sin away. So that the presence of God with our sins would be uninhabitable; but the presence of God by the atonement of Jesus Christ, so far from being uninhabitable, in his "presence there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore." And then it also means a wrathless place; but there was no wrathless place till one was made. Let the sinner go which way he may, wrath is round about him and fire is within him and fire must light upon him. Does he draw near to God? There is a fire, a consuming fire. There is no wrathless place till one is made. But then comes the burnt-offering, and the fire fell upon the offering, did not touch the people, nor fall upon them. And now comes a wrathless place, a curse less place; there is no more curse, there is no more wrath. Hence, the apostle Paul, who understood this matter a great deal better than I do, or any one now living, he saw into the solemnity of it; that there was no wrathless place for a sinner to go to, to hide himself, there is no place where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves; the apostle Paul, I say, who understood the solemnity of this, he says, "Brethren," recognizing them in this Gospel relationship, "we have boldness!" What! a guilty, a filthy, a helpless, hell-born worm of the earth, have boldness before his Maker, when it is written of some, and but for mercy, it must have been true of all, that they shall be raised to shame and everlasting contempt; but, says the apostle, "we have boldness by the blood of Jesus." Ah, that is it, that is the secret; "We have boldness to enter by the blood of Jesus into the holy of holies. You who were afar off are made near by the blood of Christ." And if you can come before God with confidence with anything else, your brow is not yet softened, the iron sinew of your presumptuous neck has not yet been bent or broken; you have not yet been rightly illuminated; there is something solemnly lacking in your religion, if you can feel any boldness before God in any way but by the precious blood of Christ. So, there is a wrathless place when Christ has made that wrathless place. As when the world was drowned, the whole globe was

engulphed, and there was no shore, it was one universal ocean; so is God's wrath; it is one universal ocean, there is no way of escape. The dear Redeemer might well say, "I am the way;" so you are, Lord, so you are, Lord; "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved;" so he shall Lord, as millions before your throne can at this moment testify, that you have saved them from the lowest hell, raised them to the highest heaven, brought them into the holy of holies, and now they rejoice in standing on sinless and wrathless ground, where there is holiness, where there is love, where there is peace, where there is joy, where there is plenty. Again, it is also a warless place. But there is no warless place without Jesus Christ; go where you may, God is at war with you. You may run to your works, or to your good name; you may say, "We have eaten and drunk in your presence, and you have taught in our streets." that is all nothing; God will be at war with you everywhere, until you lift up your eyes in hell; depend upon it, you will not be able to obtain peace, or have peace anywhere. God is at war with every man everywhere but in one place, and that is in Christ Jesus. Hence, when Aaron lifted up his hands towards the people, and blessed them, the third offering there named was that of the peace offering; there the war has ceased. Let in, the Lord says, that poor sinner, just beginning to see the way of peace; let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me. What is God's strength? Christ is God's strength; and "I can do," says Paul, "all things through Christ which strengthens me." I can make peace with God, I can enter into negotiations with God by the Lord Jesus Christ; I can plead a Savior's name, and the blessed God will not be at war with me there, for he is well pleased with his righteousness, with his person, with his work; there I shall stand upon warless ground. Jehovah lays the sword aside; it shall never be lifted against me; it was lifted against the Shepherd; he went into the battle, endured the sword, submitted to all, achieved the victory; and now the Lord takes from us our armor of opposition, our enmity, our blindness, reconciles us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us, having imputed them to his dear Son. This holy place then is a warless place, where God has no war against us, where equity and mercy, where truth and righteousness meet together, where all sweetly harmonize, where there is a spiritual level, mountains that stood in the way are lowered, the valleys (implying deficiencies) are exalted, and crooked things made strait, and rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord revealed.

Third. I now hasten to our third idea, which is that of THE MEMORIAL WORK; he was to bear their names for a memorial before the Lord. This, of course is to encourage us in looking to the Lord in remembrance of him; it is in a manner to show the way in which the Lord remembers us by his dear Son, A scripture or two upon this matter. The high priest was to appear: Lord, here we are; here are your people; you your own self did give them to me; will you refuse them now? Here is the sacrifice for them; you did remember them in their low estate, in their unsanctified, unjustified, unreconciled, unhallowed state, you did love them then, will you refuse them now? Will you forget them now? Will you reject them now? Oh, no! So that the priest had a sweet plea before the Lord. So has the Blessed Redeemer. As Aaron did not take that honor to himself, but was appointed of God, so Christ glorified not himself, but glorified God; did not his own will, but the will of God; he appears, therefore, before God in all the authority of divine appointment, so that he is sure to be heard, and the people sure to be accepted. But let us look at two or three scriptures upon this subject of memorial before the Lord. The Lord says in Isaiah, "You are my servant, O Israel, you shall not be forgotten of me." Ah, says the poor timid one of little faith, I do not get any comfort from that, Lord; I could almost wish you did forget me; for I am afraid you will remember me to remember my sins, and remember me in connection with them; that you will remember me for evil, not for good. The Lord knew that such a declaration of himself might have

that effect; and what do you think he follows up the declaration by? Are you afraid I shall remember something against you? Why, he says, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins." You say your transgressions are such a thick cloud they seem to envelope you in darkness; well, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins return unto me, for I have redeemed you." That is the way I have remembered you. It is not Moses with a fiery law, but the high priest with the breast-plate, and with all the circumstances expressive of what is said, namely, that he is to have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and that he is to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; and that he is a faithful high priest in things pertaining to God. May the Lord, as he remembers us in this way, by this wonderful memorial, help us to think of him in the same way. The saints in all ages have exceedingly delighted in this way of the Lord's remembering them. Take the 103rd Psalm, and a great many other scriptures, wherein you find the saints greatly rejoicing in the Lord's pardoning mercy, in the Lord's blotting out their sins, and, thus receiving them to himself. There are times when the child of God is so stripped of everything spiritual, so insipid, and so helpless, he feels as though he had no religion, and never had any; and so, he says, "The Lord has forsaken me; and my Lord has forgotten me." What self-contradiction we are the subjects of when we are in darkness and confusion. Look at the self-contradiction there, "My Lord has forgotten me;" and yet you say he is your Lord! Well, perhaps I went too far then. Yes, of course. "My Lord;" well, I have no other hope, so that if I have any Lord at all, he is my Lord; I have none other in heaven besides him, and none upon the earth I desire beside him. In spite of your unbelief, faith will just pop in a word, and say, "My Lord;" then unbelief springs up, and says, "has forgotten me." Ah, but faith and unbelief are not both of the same quality; one is of man, but the other is of God; so that faith says, "My Lord:" and before faith had time to say, "has not forgotten me," unbelief springs up and says, "has forgotten me;" and so, as the poor believer cannot get right, the Lord says, Well, I must come and put you right. Well, he says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child," which has such claims upon her care, "that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget;" such a thing in nature is possible; "Yet will I not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." the walls of salvation; that never were and never can be thrown down; invulnerable! impregnable! Why is this simile used? Why, perhaps to illustrate another scripture, where the Lord, by the same prophet, says; "As one whom his mother comforts;" now it is the business of the mother to comfort the little ones and the business of the father to govern the great ones, if he can; "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Thus then, the Israelites are a type of the true Israel of God, that God remembers in the new covenant with a higher remembrance than that with which he remembered them.

Forth. But lastly, he was to bear these names in the holy place before the Lord CONTINUALLY. It is to be a continuous work. I may notice in conclusion two prayers, a gracious promise, and a beautiful description, founded upon this last clause. There are two prayers. "Let your loving-kindness and your truth continually preserve me." On what ground does that prayer stand, but on the continuation of the priesthood and the intercession of Christ, the continuation of the mercy of God by Christ Jesus. Again, many of our earthly hopes will give way, and cease to be that support to us which they have been. What then is the remedy? "Be you my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." Then third the gracious promise, "The Lord shall guide you continually and where will he guide you to? The following part of the verse shows us. "He will satisfy your soul in drought; and make fat your bones;" that is a figurative expression, to denote he will keep

up your youth. When people grow old, their bones grow dry; and the idea here intended, therefore, is that of keeping up the spiritual youth of the Christian. "And you shall be like a watered garden," a royal garden, taken great care of, the Lord watering it every moment; and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." Every other consolation must run dry; but here are springs that can never fail. Lastly, a beautiful description; the apostle says of the Lord Jesus Christ, "this man, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood." I think the word "unchangeable" there will mean three things; first, an interminable priesthood; "he is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek;" secondly, an immutable priesthood; it is not changeable in itself, for it will be the same after the lapse of countless ages that it is now; third, an untransferable priesthood; the office of priest in the Old Testament passed from one to another, generation after generation; but the priesthood of Christ is untransferable; he had no predecessor, he has no successor; "he had an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."