

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

A SERMON

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“And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud and their enemies beheld them.” Revelation 11:12

I HAVE observed that the slaying and resurrection, times, or time, spoken of in this chapter, applies not merely, as the learned have thought, to one circumstance in the history of the church, but that it applies to the successive slaying times and resurrection times that have taken place in the church, and may take place in the church, down to the end of time: upon this we dwelt last Sunday morning. I may merely just observe relative to these slaying times and resurrection times which were both very numerous and very terrible, it is not my intention to enter into that matter this morning, but we do not forget what we have felt in passing through the ten direful persecutions that took place for about 250 years, from the time of Nero, the sixtieth year of the first century, down to the time of Diocletian, the ten times ten thousand Christians during those 250 years of what are called the ten great Pagan persecutions; the tens of thousands of Christians that were put to death in a way it makes us shudder to read of, when we look at the infinite variety of cruelties invented by which they were tortured to death. Yet, at the same time, although thus slain officially and slain literally, yet not one Christian was slain vitally, for he that loses his life, his natural life, and that is all he can lose, shall keep it, shall keep his soul unto eternal life. So that while they were slain thus literally and officially, still there, were some that: they could slay only officially, and could not slay even literally; so that at all times there were some dead bodies, that is officially dead, of the saints lying in the great street of the city called Egypt and Sodom, ready to rise, and again preach the gospel and again sound out the good news of everlasting mercy, when the Spirit of the Lord should again enter into them. So that I say the slaying times spoken of, their resurrection after three days and a half, applies not only to the preceding circumstances of John's day, but all the after as well. Nor do we forget the tens of thousands slain under the direction of Rome; the Waldenses put to death in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; nor do we forget St Bartholomew's day 24th of August, 1572, when seventy thousand Protestants were put to death at the instigation of Romanism; nor do we forget the one hundred and fifty thousand Protestants put to death by the Roman Catholics in the seventeenth century in Ireland; nor do we forget the death of many in the

last century: nor do we forget the Tudors, and the blessed Mary, of sweet memory; nor do we forget the tyrannies of the Church of England, the hundreds that she has put to death; the only excuse that I can make for her is that she learnt that bad habit of Rome, seeing that she herself is in reality a daughter of Rome, only she is ashamed to own her mother; but she might as well, for some parts of her are very much like her mother; I am sure there is no very striking difference. I am sure the man was not very far wrong when he was asked what difference there was between the Papist and the Puseyite, and he said one was a Roman Catholic, and the other was a Roman candlestick; and I thought the man was certainly not far out. I say, we do not forget these circumstances that have taken place, nor must we forget that the Puritans themselves, as far as they could organize themselves into an ecclesiastical body, and Calvin himself took part in it. The very devil himself seemed to reign in those days, that whatever party gained the ascendancy they thought they must persecute the others. The only excuse that I have for Calvin and the Puritans is that they learnt it of Rome. It is very difficult when you are brought up to a certain religion, to unlearn all your bad manners at once, so that these bad manners they carried with them. After all, therefore, I blame Romanism for the persecution exercised by the Church of England and by the Puritans, more than I blame the men themselves, they had been accustomed, to bad habits, and you know habit is a very powerful thing. Once give way to evil habit, it becomes tyrannical, and they felt that they must kill somebody; it had become so customary and fashionable, they must kill somebody. I sometime ago could not but notice the remarks in one of our public prints upon this when the Catholics complained of the effigies of the Cardinal being carried about and what was the answer of the Editor? We must burn somebody; and we do not like to do as you do, burn a real person; we only burn the effigy of the person. I have a most vivid impression on my mind of the persecutions that have from time to time taken place. We live certainly in a day in which we are highly favored; and may the Lord preserve us not only from, abusing our liberty and abusing our mercies, but may the Lord, help us to use them to his honor, to his glory, and to our good and may old England long continue, to enjoy the sweet, freedom she enjoys now; for with all the little complaints we make, we have nothing very important to complain of, as, long as we can have our rights as citizens, and, especially as Christians. I think we ought to think our country a very happy country where we can, from, week to week, and almost from day to day, meet to speak out the glorious truths of the everlasting gospel of God. Thus then, friends, all the slaying times that have taken place have been followed by resurrection times. Some men take this as though it applied only to one part of the church's history, perhaps the church was never lower than in the beginning of the 16th century, when the Lord raised Luther up? I think if we go through Milner, or Sabine, or Mosheim, or other church historians, we shall find that the church was in that age perhaps lower than it had ever been before; but then there was a corresponding resurrection; it was a great resurrection was that in the time of Luther, What a wonderful man he was, what wonders that man did; and yet by very simple means; he simply took up the Archimedean lever, shall I call it, of justification by faith without the works of the law, and with that he moved the Popish world, turned it upside down, and they have never been able to get things right again since that; and God grant they never may: for we all rejoice in the downfall of the powers of darkness, the uprising of the glorious gospel of God, and the ingathering of sinners to that salvation by which alone we can be saved.

Now I do not suppose I shall in the few moments I have, get all the way through the verse this morning. I should like to have done so, but I am afraid I shall not. We have then, in the first place, after tracing out these witnesses last Lord's-day morning, and the kind of resurrection they

experienced, after just reminding you of their enemies greatly rejoicing over their death, hoping that they would never rise again, yet now these witnesses are made to rejoice, and the enemies are made to mourn; and this accords only with that order of things which the Savior has declared: he says, "The world shall rejoice, but you shall weep and lament:" only he explains the matter thus, that your sorrow shall be turned into joy, whereas their joy must be turned into sorrow; for all the joy that is not founded on the fear of God, all joy that does not arise from God's salvation, must come to nothing. We have then this morning, in the first place, *the command to the witnesses*; "They heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither." Secondly, we have *their realization of that command*, "and they ascended up to heaven in a cloud;" we then, thirdly and lastly, have *the dismay of their enemies*; "and their enemies beheld them." Do you not at once see the helplessness of the enemy here? The enemy beheld them: that is all their enemies could do, they could stand, and look on; and now they rage to see these witnesses in the ascendant, to see them enthroned, to see them reigning, they could behold them: and now they rage, and that is all they could do. Oh, how true it is under all circumstances, "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

Frist: I notice then, first, the COMMAND: "They heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither." Now this great voice, of course, is the voice of God in contrast to the voice of man. The voice of man is to men generally greater than the voice of God; the voice of Rome is a greater voice to the Roman Catholic than the voice of God's word; and the Church of England Prayer Book, unhappily, to many Church of England people, especially of the Puseyite class, is a greater voice than the voice of the Bible itself: such a tendency has there been in all ages to esteem the voice of man as stronger than the voice of God. But blessed, happy indeed is that people who are brought to turn a deaf ear to the voice of man, and to recognize the voice of God, and to distinguish the voice of God; that is to say, distinguish the truth of God from the doctrines of men. And the Savior says it shall be so in relation to his people for when he calls his people sheep, he says, "They hear my voice, and a stranger will they not follow;" they know my voice, they understand my voice, they obey my voice, and they are brought by my voice into green pastures, and they shall have eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of my hands. But we will come to definition.

The great voice here is in the first place, as I shall prove as I go along, *the Voice of Ingathering*; second, it is *the Voice of Eternity* and, third, it is *the Voice of Revelation*. First, that it is *the voice of ingathering*, This I gather first from the 27th of Isaiah. It is said there, "It shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish." "In that day." Now the preceding parts of that chapter will give us the day that is there intended, and at the same time set before us a description of the character that shall be gathered in; for as I have already observed in my discourse, upon this subject, that although there are but two witnesses spoken of here, yet they represent all the people of God; and that all the people of God are God's witnesses, and therefore included in whatever is here in a way of mercy said of the witnesses; it includes all the people of God. Now the 27th of Isaiah, then, will show the day in which the great trumpet is to be blown: it is to be a day of victory; and as we go along, finding out this, it will, as I have said, describe the persons who will recognize what God has done. And then the gospel of God, that declares what God has done, is the antitypical jubilee, setting the prisoner free, bringing him into that inheritance which the Lord has for him and the day in which the trumpet is thus to sound is the day in which the Lord would punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan the

crooked serpent, and would slay the dragon that is in the sea. Now the Lord Jesus did this when he died; that is to say, he did it mediatorially; he then punished Satan; he then, as the apostle witnesses, in a sense killed Satan, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Now when a sinner is brought to feel that he has hitherto been under the dominion of sin, under the dominion of darkness, he asks the question, How can I gain the victory; how can I overcome my sin, and how thereby can I overcome Satan? for there is no overcoming Satan without overcoming sin. Satan overcomes us by sin; he brought us into trouble by the fall that took place under his influence; and so, he is the accuser of the brethren. And then the great trumpet of victory is sounded by what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, that he is the end of sin, and he being the end of sin, he having atoned for sin, and having put an end to sin, hereby Satan is slain; hereby the tyranny of Satan is overturned; hereby the dragon is brought to nothing; and a poor sinner brought to lay hold, by precious faith of the victory that Jesus Christ has wrought. If the Holy Spirit is pleased, for instance, weak as you may be in yourself, to bring such a scripture as this with power into the soul, "The warfare is accomplished;" and then it explains what is intended in that warfare; being accomplished, that your iniquity is pardoned, not may be, or shall be, but it is done. There is a sense, as Mister Triggs used to observe, in which sin was never forgiven but once; and although the pardon be often renewed in the experience of the Christian in his way home to glory, still our sins were mediatorially, first and last, the whole of them, blotted out, pardoned, forgiven, when Christ died; there all was forgiven; (not indeed in the manifestation of it to our consciences, but) there is no more remembrance of sin before God; there is no more sacrifice for sin, because no more is needed. Now this is the great trumpet that says, "Come up hither."

And, my hearer, when favored to lay hold of this victory, and enjoy this pardon, and enter into this double, this grace and glory which the Lord gives, as not the effect as described in our text, "Come up hither" Do you not come up out of your guilt, do you not come up then out of your fears, and out of your terrors, and out of the power of Satan; and are you not then standing as upon the Rock of Ages, and you can rejoice that God has given you the victory. It is a great voice of victory, sounding out; the great victory that Christ has wrought; for of all the victories recorded in the Bible, and there are no victories so wonderful in any military or naval history as are found in the scriptures; and yet all those victories that were wrought by holy men of old, fall infinitely short, both in kind, in magnitude, and in design, of that wondrous victory wrought by the omnipotent arm of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing can bring us up out of the pit, nothing can bring us up into fellowship with God, nothing can bring us up higher, but that mighty conquest that puts sin down, that puts death down, that puts Satan down, that puts the powers of darkness down, that puts error down, puts all these down and here you may soar as high as you like. The victory of Jesus Christ conquers everything. This then is that great voice that says, "Come up hither." And to whom is it said? Why, it is said to the man who feels he has no more power against his sin, he can no more alter his nature; you can no more alter what you are, than you can create a world; there is no way of surviving, there is no way of surmounting this, no way of conquering, no way of rising, no way of gaining the victory, but by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, then the first clause of our text is nothing else but the description of a mission of the gospel, both in the first quickening of the soul and in the times of reviving which we experience on our way to eternal repose. And then this is not only a day of victory, but also a day of safe keeping. In that day when you are brought to receive Jesus Christ as this victory, in that day you will see your safety. The Lord has a vineyard of red wine, and he keeps it; he waters it every moment, and keeps it night and day, lest any hurt it. Ah, says one, I hate that doctrine, I can see a great deal of Calvinism there; you are going on nicely this

morning; here is a victory that you are making out the people will be eternal conquerors by that victory, and more than conquerors, and then you follow up victory with security. Why, of course it is; the victory is complete, the vineyard is in safe keeping, the people are in safe keeping, the Lord keeps it night and day, lest any should hurt it. Ah, says one, I hate that. You do? The Lord foresaw that you would hate it, and you think that he will not hurt you for hating it, you think there is no harm in hating it: if you do hate it, do you know what you are? I will tell you, you are a bramble, a brier. That in God's estimation you are a bramble. And our translators ought to have put to the first clause of that 4th verse in the 27th of Isaiah a note of interrogation; where it reads, "Fury is not in me," the word is not in the original, and ought to have been left out, and it ought to have been an interrogation "Fury not in me?" Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? "I would burn them up together." Ah, when once you are convinced that to hate God there, proves that you are but a bramble and a brier; ah, you will say, ah, if that be true, if my hating him in that victory, if my hating him in that eternal security which his people have, makes me a bramble and a brier, and I must know that there is fury in him, that he will burn up all his enemies, ah, then there is no hope for me, is there? Yes, bramble, I will still address you as a bramble and a brier, for there is a promise that instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree; and who knows, poor bramble, but you may become a fir tree? and instead of the brier shall come up a myrtle tree; who knows, poor brier, but you may become a myrtle tree some day? and if you do, then you will be not to yourself for a name; you will be unto the Lord for a name, there is the difference, you see; now you are concerned about having a good name for yourself, whereas then you are to be to the Lord for a name, you are then to be a trophy of his conquering grace; you are then to be an object of his care; and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. Mark the kindness of the Lord. "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together."

But there is a poor sinner, convinced of his error, ah, the Lord says, "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall" what a poor bramble like me? yes, if you are brought to see that to stand against God's truth is not only vain, but must be to your own destruction and so the Lord kindly says, to find out the poor sinner convinced of his error, "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." Do you ask what God's strength is? Well, take his promise, that is his strength, that is one thing meant in his strength. Lord, your Holy Word says to the poor sinner that has been as a bramble and as a brier, fighting against the realities of eternal truth; you have said, if he shall desire to take hold of your strength, he shall make peace with you: Lord, I plead that promise, help me to take hold of your strength. Then again, this strength will mean the atonement of Jesus Christ. "As for you also, by the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold," so that the blood of the everlasting covenant, the atonement of Jesus Christ, is the stronghold. Why, the disciples were astonished at the strength they had by faith in Jesus, when they came and said, "Lord, even devils are subject to us through your name." Ah, his name is a stronghold: it is a name that is above every name that is named, not only in the world that now is, but also in that which is to come. There is no peace with God but by the obedient life and atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this trumpet is to be blown for the bringing up of poor sinners, that they may sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; and to know that it is by grace that they are saved, and taught that the Lord will, in this way, show forth in eternal ages to come, the exceeding riches of his grace. This is a great trumpet, that sounds out a great victory, a great security, and great peace, peace that passes all understanding. And then, relative

to this trumpet, the Lord asks a question which bears, and that is one reason why I have referred so to that chapter, which bears upon the very subject connected with our text. Now these witnesses are slain, but they rise again, either in their successors, or else in their own persons, and those that do not rise again in their own persons in this world, will rise to glory in their own persons at the last great day; and many of them, as we have shown, have risen again in their own persons, after being officially slain. Now, in the twenty-seventh of Isaiah, there is a question upon this subject asked worthy of your attention. It is there said, "Has he smitten him as he smote those that smote him?" No! no! The Lord has smitten Jacob, it is true, but not as he smote those that smote him; he smites his own people in a way of rebuke, in a way of conviction, but he smites the enemy according to the prayer of Moses, "Bless, Lord," that is, Levi, the priesthood, "his substance, accept you the work of his hands, smite through the loins of those that hate him, and of those that rise against him, that they rise not again." God smites the enemies of his people fatally and finally; but he smites his own people in the way beautifully described in Hosea 6, "The Lord has torn, and he will heal us, he has smitten, and he will bind us up." If he smites us in soul, he will heal us; if he smites Job in circumstances, that was a heavy stroke, yet the Lord healed, and turned Job's captivity. "After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight;" see how beautifully it accords with the three days here. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord, his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." "Has he smitten him as he smote those that smote him?" Is Jacob slain according to the slaughter of them that were slain by him? No, Jacob may be slain in body, but he can be slain no further; while the enemies are slain never to regain their standing, they are slain from all hope, from all help, and cast into hell for ever. Now in that day of victory, in that day of safety, in that day of reconciliation, in that day of chastisement on the one hand and judgment on the other; in that day when he shall "stay his rough wind in the day of the east wind;" that was when Christ died: that was the day of the rough wind, and that was the day in which the east wind, the poison wind, the blasting wind of God's wrath was stayed. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;" so it was, he has himself purged our sins, sat down for ever on the right hand of God. Now this then is the great voice. Let us ask ourselves, is the victory of Christ in our estimation greater than anything else? is the safety that we have in him better than any other security whatever; and is the peace, that we have in him unto us superior to any other peace whatever, and is his care of us, and putting away our sin, in our estimation greater than anything else? If so, then the gospel is unto us a great voice, and we know it does bring us up. Oh how many times have we been cast down relative to our families, and relative to providential matters, relative to circumstances, relative to church matters; many, many things to cast us down; has not a word come sometimes and made us cheerful in spite of all our sorrows, and happy in spite of all our unhappiness, and comfortable in spite of all our uncomfortableness? I think there is a great deal of fine feeling and beautiful Christian experience in that expression of the apostle's, when he says, "You received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost;" as though he should say, you have your troubles, but when the Lord brings home a word with power, then in the midst of those afflictions the word comes in as a sweetener, takes the bitterness out of that which is of itself very bitter, like the waters of Marah; a word comes in like the tree cut down, makes everything sweet, and you can then rejoice that the Lord is pleased to give you the bitters, for, as good John Bunyan says, the bitters make the sweet the-sweeter. The voice of the gospel then, is a great voice; "They heard a great voice saying, Come up hither." This coming up hither applies not merely to one circumstance, not merely to any one manifestation of the Lord's mercy; at a dying hour, when the soul leaves the body, there is a great voice, "Come up hither;" and by-

and-bye, when the body shall be called out of the grave, it will be by a great voice, "Come up hither;" and when the saints of God shall be ranged in their unnumbered millions at the last great day, occupying an extent that we have no adequate idea of, the great voice shall be, "Come up hither, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Second. But second, it is the VOICE OF ETERNITY. First chapter of Revelation. I am taking the Bible for my guide, and I hope you are content with that, I hope you are not saying, I wish our minister would interweave a little more of history, I wish he would give us sometimes some nice flights of oratory upon science, and throw in a little of what the people call diamond dust, to make the sermon sparkle. I should be grieved to my very soul if I thought you wanted any such tinsel, any such garnishing. If we are Christians, the Word of God will be our food, a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path; and we shall want to live not upon the gifts of the minister, but upon the grace of God. In the first chapter of this book John says, "I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Ah, this is a great voice. Christ is the Alpha of my religion, I cannot begin to live without him; cannot begin to believe without him: cannot begin to love without him; cannot begin to rejoice without him; he is the beginning, and he is also the end; the Omega. Ah, I do rejoice, said the poor soul, in him, for he is the great Melchizedek, none before him, none after him. Here we have Jesus Christ in the eternity of his covenant character, in the eternity of his Sonship. Ah, says one, do you believe in the eternity of his Sonship? I should be very sorry if I did not; I believe in the eternity of his Sonship in the same sense as the eternity of the covenant.

The doctrine of a begotten Divinity I reject: it came from and let it go back to the heathen world; but covenant; relationship I glory in; and that Jesus Christ by virtue of the covenant was the Son of God from eternity, the Priest of God from eternity: there is not one character that he now sustains in actual operation that he did not relatively sustain from eternity; if it were not so, how could it be said that the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting as well as to everlasting? "I am Alpha and Omega;" he is relatively so as well as personally. He is not only the beginning of salvation and the completion of it; but he is the beginning and the completion of that which accompanies salvation; he is the author and the finisher of our faith. And now some of you Wesleyans, you think sin can finish our faith; whereas Christ finished sin; but sin cannot finish Christ, cannot put an end to him. Take the Bible, and look at it: "the end of your faith," saith Peter, "even the salvation of your souls;" that is the kind of finish that Christ will make; he is the author and the finisher of our faith. Thus then, it is a voice of ingathering and a voice of eternity, to raise us above time, and above the things of time.

Third. And then, in conclusion, it is THE VOICE ALSO OF REVELATION. This I get from the fourth chapter of this same book. "A door" said John, "was opened in heaven." It was opened to John, so it is to you. I do not believe it is to me: why, you silly thing it is; I speak now to the real Christian, the doubting one. Ah, but you cannot say that there is a door open for me in heaven, there was to John; but not to me. Why, how can you say that? What a poor weak thing you are; do not you know what the Bible says? Now let your humble servant explain it to you, and I would shame you out of your doubts and fears if I could. Know you what the Lord himself says what Jesus said? If Jesus had said, there is a door, if you can find it: why, the poor disciples, like the rest of us, would have looked east, west, north, and south to find the door. But he says, "*I am, the door;*

by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved!" Now are you satisfied? Is not that door open to you? Ah, I am afraid not. Afraid not! Well, but you have no other way, you do not expect to go to God any other way, do you? You will not be turned away; he that comes to this door shall never be cast out; no, never, no, never, never! You have no other hope. Why, he is the door that is opened in heaven. And what was the voice? John says, "I heard a voice as it were of a trumpet talking with me." And what did the voice say to John? poor John in the Isle of Patmos; a lonely, solitary place, where we often are, if not locally, in the sense in which he was, yet circumstantially and spiritually cast down. The voice said, "Come up hither;" and then it was the Lord's day, and John was in the Spirit. Now this is the voice of revelation. Just, see the effect it had upon John, and has it not the same effect upon all the people of God? "I was in the Spirit." And so, it is, whenever revelation is made to us of the love of God, the grace of God, and the mercy of God; then we are in the Spirit. I have preached many a sermon when I have been in the flesh; and oh, what hard work it has been, I have looked at the clock, and wished I could reach it, and push it on. And you have sometimes heard in the flesh; you have been in the flesh; your soul has been absorbed in the flesh and fleshly things. But ah, when the Lord brings me up in the Spirit, and when he brings you into the Spirit, then there is such sweet correspondence between your state of mind, and the things of God, that the glories of God strike your mind, and you are enabled to understand and look into them. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." It is the Lord's day then, not sin's day then; it is quiet; not the day of doubts and fears; they are quiet; not the day of trouble, it is the Lord's day, the day of the Son of man; the day of the Bridegroom, in which you cannot fast, for the Bridegroom is with you. And how sweet this voice of revelation is. I never can preach from a scripture comfortably unless I can feel some power in it; and perhaps nine out of ten texts that I preach from here and elsewhere, I have realized some light and life from, them in private before; and the light, and sweetness, and power I have got from them remains with me more or less, when I preach from them. It is that kind of revelation described by the apostle, when he says, "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord; we are changed into the same image."

So that this voice whether taken, as the voice of ingathering, the voice of eternity, or the voice of revelation, opening to us a door in heaven, is a great voice. Though every door on earth was closed to John, yet there was a door opened in heaven; he was in the Spirit, and there he was happy. And just so now, however dark things may appear on earth, yet if the Lord open a door in heaven, and brings us up into fellowship with him, then all is well. Now as to where they were to go, we are told in this verse they ascended up to heaven in a cloud. But your time is gone; and I must say no more.