

DO THYSELF NO HARM

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning February 16th, 1862

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 4 Number 165

“And if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.” Revelation 11:5

I FELT, in concluding our discourse last Lord's day morning, from the last verse of the 65th chapter of Isaiah, that something more ought to be said upon the final dominion and blessedness of the people of God, indicated in the words there set before us, and in the declaration here made upon the same subject, that “If any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.” But as we have already several sermons in print upon the witnesses spoken of in this chapter, I need now, by way of introduction, to give scarcely any observations in a way of explanation. Suffice it to say, that these witnesses evidently are the ministers of the gospel. They are compared to olive-trees; and they are spoken of in Zechariah as ministering oil to keep the lamps of the temple burning. And happy is that minister who is so favored by his ministry, to minister from time to time that grace unto the hearers that shall cause their faith to grow; that shall cause their love to continue to burn towards that God that has loved them, so that sometimes they may say, with the disciples, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?” But then, as these witnesses, these ministers, represent the people of God, it does, of course, signify not only the ministers of the gospel, but that these witnesses mean all the people of God, for the Lord says of all his people, “You are my witnesses.” They can bear testimony of God in a way that no other people can. And as to their prophesying in sackcloth a given time, that we have explained before, that the Lord's people have their time of trouble; and at the termination of their appointed captivity, then their sackcloth shall be put off, and they shall be girded with gladness. They have to undergo their slaying times, and they will have their resurrection times. I have very little sympathy with those explanations, or rather comments, that give this chapter a mere historical meaning; the whole of it must be understood spiritually. We might as well take the Savior's parables literally, and declare that they have only a literal meaning, as to take the declarations in Isaiah, relative to the wolf and the lamb feeding together, and a variety of other things; we might as well attempt to take the Savior's parables in the mere letter, and declare that those parables have no spiritual meaning, as to give a mere literal meaning to those ancient and beautiful prophecies, all having a spiritual meaning, and bearing reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and to the people of Jesus Christ, and to the ultimate glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, as to these witnesses, the people of God, it is here said that "If any man will hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their enemies." You cannot understand this literally. There would be something absurd in taking it to mean a literal fire, literally in the mouths of the people, and for this fire to proceed out of their mouths. They would, indeed, be spitfires then, in the literal and ridiculous sense of the word. The fire here means their living testimony, that they bear testimony that he that believes shall be saved, that he that believes not shall be damned, that they bear testimony of the living truths of God's word of judgment. "So let all your enemies perish, O Lord." There is the fire, their living testimony of God's wrath against all his enemies; this is their testimony, which is written in the Bible, and which God will make good. And thus, the saints already judge the world testimonially; and by and by they shall judge the world confirmatorily; when the Savior shall pronounce the ultimate sentence upon the lost, they shall sign the sentence with their Amen, and loud and solemn hallelujahs at the ministration of his judgements, the consummation of his mercies, the establishment of his kingdom, and the revelations of his glory. Thus, then these things in a proper sense, namely, in a spiritual sense, we may profit thereby.

Whatever the Lord Jesus Christ is in his mediatorial character, that they are; however holy he is, they are the same; and however righteous he is, they are the same; and however perfect he is, they are the same, and however faultless or spotless he is, they are the same, and however he is loved, they are loved with the same love. No wonder, therefore, having thus loved them, that he should take this care of them. Let us, therefore, have some circumstances from the word of God to set forth the contrast between the two, and to set forth the mercy to the one, and judgment to the other; and of course, we shall read out, as we go along. Take, in the first place, Cain and Abel; what a declaration you have there of the truth of our text. There is Cain; he is determined to slay Abel. But let us see first what Abel was. Abel was a free-grace man. Abel was brought to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and was reconciled to God in a way that accorded with the perfections of God. Abel received the truth; and wherever that truth is rightly received, every other truth is received. Abel received the delightful truth of Christ's atonement, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is just where Abel was. And if we are taught of God, we shall be his witnesses in this matter, that we are saved entirely by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the atonement of Jesus Christ, that the Lord provided that remedy, and that the Lord brought us to know our need of that remedy, that he has revealed this unto us. Now here Abel was a witness for God. Cain hated this; and we see the judgment that came upon Cain. He became a wanderer and a vagabond upon the earth, having no settled hope. He went about from place to place. It is true that he did at the last build a city; but then those words could never be set aside, that he was to be a wanderer; he was to go from place to place, and never have a settled hope. Now, this is just the way with everyone that does not know his need of Jesus Christ; that is not brought to hope in Jesus Christ. When we were in a state of nature, we hoped from object to object; we hoped in this, and we hoped in the other and we looked to one thing, and looked to the other, but all of it within the range of time. We had no settled hope; we were enemies; we knew nothing of the hope we now know. But we have now a settled hope; we have now a settled habitation; we have now a settled home; and hence our prayer now is, and this man that can truly pray that prayer has a right spirit, "Be you," said the Psalmist unto the Lord, "my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." These are the people of God, that are thus brought to Christ; that have this settled home; that have this settled hope; and that have no desire to give up one participle of this truth, Here then if I am brought thus far whatever my faults might be, they are forgiven; they are covered, they are forgotten, they

are put away, they are gone; and as the Israelites were not to see the Egyptians any more forever, not alive, they saw many of them dead, for they saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore, and so, when you look at your sins, and think they are alive you are afraid of them; but if you can see them dead, if you can see them in what Christ has done, that while the strength of sin is the law, Christ is the end of the law, that sin has no strength left, that its power is gone, its condemning and reigning power is gone, and that these enemies must forever die, I say, when we can see these things in this light, it endears the Lord, and enables us to bear testimony to his blessed word. But the man who is not thus reconciled to God is under wrath, under judgment. And if the man who is not thus reconciled to God, if he will hurt the truth of God, or the people of God, then there are fiery judgments awaiting him that must overtake him.

The Lord took care of Abel; for though Abel was thus slain in body, he was received into glory. And Abel never regretted it. If we could see him now, and ask him whether he was hurt by what Cain did to him, that is, finally hurt, he would say, No. If we could see him now, he would not for one moment acknowledge that it did him any real harm; it drove him home, that was all it did. And if we say, sometimes, of tribulation,

“Blest be the storm that drives us nearer home,”

So, Abel would say, “It brought me home.” And it is a state of things so surpassing anything we can understand while here, that I am sure he would not at all regret it. But again, passing over several other circumstances, look at the Lord’s care over the Israelites, in contrast to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was determined to hurt them. See what a position they were in. But then the Lord was on their side. There was the cloud of truth. But first, for that I still must abide by, there was the paschal lamb. It is a remarkable thing that the paschal lamb should be introduced before they came out of Egypt, in order that those who were spiritual among them might see how the Lord would abide by them. Just so now, if we are thus brought to Jesus Christ, it matters not what there is against us. No. I shall presently show that all that are against us must die; all must come to nothing. Pharaoh was determined to overtake them, determined to slay them, determined to bring them back again; but he was not able to do so. The Israelites, I admit, were very much frightened, and cried to Moses, and found fault with their having been brought out; but while they were very much frightened, there was not one of them hurt. And so many of us have been frightened many times, but we have always been more frightened than hurt, always. We are such poor creatures. Jacob was dreadfully frightened. All these things are against me. There is Joseph, he is dead, and Simeon is gone; and now here is Benjamin will be gone. And Jacob was dreadfully frightened, but he was not hurt after all. Why, you are not dead yet, Jacob. No; but I shall be killed. Not you. Ah I but see what my troubles are. Why, you are frightened, that’s all, you are not hurt. And so, the Israelites were dreadfully frightened, but not one was hurt. The Lord stepped in just in time; the Lord would not step in too soon. There were two ends to be answered before the Lord would step in; the one was to show the danger, if left to themselves, to which they were exposed. And so, the Lord shows us the danger in which we are without Christ. That was one end the Lord had in view in not stepping in too soon. And another end, equally important, that the Lord had in view in not stepping in too soon, was to let them see what they themselves were, in order that they might know that his interposition was an interposition of mercy. And so, they rebelled there at the Red Sea. But did that hinder the Lord interposing? Did that hinder the Lord placing himself between them and their adversaries? from defending them? from dividing the Red Sea? from being with them through the

Red Sea? from giving them the victory? from destroying their enemies, and delivering them? How expressive is this of the care which the Lord takes of his people! If you and I have but a grain of faith in the infinite sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are placed in that position in which it matters not what we have to encounter. There is the Lord. It is true he does hide himself from us, to show us more clearly our need of his mercy, and to show us more of what we are, that we may know what is in our hearts, and hereby to appreciate him the more when he does appear; hereby to humble us, that we may be nothing, and that he may be everything. If then, we look at Able, sustained, which, of course, he was, to die for the truth's sake, and received into everlasting glory; if we look at the Israelites, and take a spiritual as well as circumstantial view of it, who would not be in the hands of the Lord? Ah! This same God thus loves us and keeps us as the apple of his eye. He will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed. Who would not be in the hands of such a God as this? I need not run on for time would fail to set before you the almost innumerable circumstances of contrast in the Bible between friends and foes. We see, then, how the Lord takes care of those that are brought thus to receive Jesus Christ; and we see what a dreadful thing it is to be an enemy to his truth. There was not one captivity to which the Israelites were subjected that did not originate in their apostatizing into a state of practical enmity against the priesthood; against that order of things by which the true God, in his order of things, was set aside, and human inventions put into the place of divine ordinations. And their Babylonish captivity originated in the same thing; they went away from God's truth and set up human inventions. We see the result. And then, when the Savior came, they would hurt him; they would kill him. They were mad upon it, they were set upon it, madly crying, "Crucify him! crucify him! Away with him!" We have not, in all the Bible, a more awful display of the deadly malice and blindness of the human mind than in that of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ. There Satan appeared in all the forces of his Satanic malice. Well might the Savior say, "Now is their hour and power of darkness." But look, on the other hand, at the fire that proceeded from the testimony of God. Look at the dreadful yet righteous judgments of God that fell upon that guilty nation. Ah! see what they suffered. Everything spoken in those chapters in the gospels, descriptive of their destruction, came to pass; every vial of wrath was emptied upon them; every flash, shall I say? Of Sinai, every threatening that God made came upon them; and there they are, scattered unto this day. So that how clear it is, then, "If any man will hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth", that is, their testimony, "and devours their enemies!" Thus, then, if we stand with Able, then the Lord takes care of us. If we are with the Israelites, receiving the paschal lamb, and looking to Christ as our way of escape, then the Lord takes care of us. If we are with the Lord's true prophets, and siding with God's Jeremiah's in their testimony of the eternity of God's love, and the certainty of God's covenant; for Jeremiah did testify of these, it is clear, the eternity of God's love and the eternity and certainty of his covenant, if we are one with the prophet in this, and if we side with the Lord Jesus Christ in his blessed testimony that he laid down his life for the sheep, and his sheep can never perish; if we side with his holy apostles, that "the election has obtained it;" if this be our position, if this be our spirit, if this be our standing, then the Lord is on our side. And when David recognized his own standing as being thus with the Lord, and reconciled to him, he came to these beautiful conclusions: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?" "The Lord is the strength of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?" Here, then, we see the care the Lord takes of them that he thus reconciles unto himself.

But I just now hinted that such is the joy the Lord has in his people, such is the love he has to them, and such, shall I say? the diligent way in which he watches over them, so that no one can hurt them

without being judged, so no one can do them a favor without being benefited thereby. How clear this is from the word of God! Let us give some few instances of this. Take, in the first place, Laban. Now Laban would have injured Jacob; and Jacob was just the man I have described, he was one that God loved, and knew that God loved him. And if you want to know what Jacob's creed was, as people call it, read the 28th chapter of Genesis, and there you see the yea and amen promises that were made to Jacob. That is just where Jacob was, and just what he was; and if that is my position, then it is because I am loved with the same love and saved with the same salvation.

Now Laban would have hurt Jacob. The Lord appeared to Laban, and said, "Take heed that you speak not to Jacob either good or bad;" that is, do not injure him by fraud or force. You have got two plans in your mind, Laban, I see them; the one is, you will go and flatter him, and promise him a wonderful deal of favor if he will come back again, and then when you get him back near enough to your own home, you will take advantage of him; and then you have got another plan, to fall upon him and kill him at once if you can. Well, now, you shall not carry either of them out; you shall not speak to him that flattering good, and you shall not speak to him evil. And so, Laban was afraid. So, the Lord will do now. If you have some person and plans against you, the Lord will alter those plans; he will take the wise in their own craftiness. So, Laban said, "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt; but the God of your father," not the gods that some of your household have stolen, but "the God of your father spoke unto me yesternight." "I know that," said Jacob. "Well; what are you going to do now, Laban?" Well, my better way now is to make the best of a bad job. I meant to be just where Jacob is; I meant to have had all the strong and good cattle and meant Jacob to have had all the refuse and the feeble; that is what I meant; but, instead of that, Jacob has got all the strong and good cattle; just where I meant to be. I meant Jacob to be just where I am, and I meant to be just where Jacob is. Ah! but then you see, friend Laban, the Lord intended Jacob to be where he is, and he intended you to be where you are. You thought you were a very wise man and thought this high-doctrine Jacob was a great fool; but then it did not matter how great a fool Jacob was, nor how wise you were; it was the Lord that put Jacob where he is, and the Lord put Laban where he is. Well, then, says Laban, I suppose I must make the best of a bad job, and so we will make a covenant not to do each other any harm. Well, Jacob did not wish to injure Laban; and Laban, though he wished to injure Jacob, could not, and so they made a covenant, and Laban went back pretty contentedly, and made the best of a bad job. Well, now, Laban, I dare to say, lived in peace, and afterwards would think to himself, Well, I am glad I did not go any further; for if I had touched Jacob, if the Lord had permitted me to touch him, I should have been killed; I am only thwarted as it is, I am only stopped in my plan. Why, it is a good thing that Jacob's God stopped me; I think Jacob's God is a good God, after all, because he might have let me go on to do Jacob some injury, and then come in and cut me down; but instead of that, he stopped me, and I have made a covenant with Jacob, and Jacob will not hurt me, and I will not hurt him. And Jacob never went back again; depend upon it, he was glad he had gone away. Now, if some of you are seeking to injure the people of God, you had better let them alone, have a covenant of friendship, because you cannot alter it; Jacob will be Jacob, and God will be God, and faith will be faith, and religion will be religion, and grace will be grace, do what you may.

May the Lord enable us more and more to realize our standing and the care the Lord takes of us. Well, then, Jacob having got out of one trouble, like the rest of us, he has another to face. Ah! said he, now I am frightened; I am dreadfully frightened now. Ah! but you are not hurt. Ah! but I shall be. Nonsense, did Laban hurt you? No; but Esau will, though: and he is coining against me with

four hundred men, and I have only a few old women and a parcel of little children, a pretty army mine is I do not know what I shall do, I am sure, dreadfully frightened. Well, but, Jacob, do not you think the Lord is able to take care of you? Yes, he is. Well, then, look to him. And this circumstance did with Jacob as many of our circumstances are intended to do with us, to bring us on the knee of solemn and earnest prayer before God. And Jacob honestly confessed he was afraid of Esau, and he prayed earnestly to the Lord, and the Lord appeared to him, as beautifully described in that same chapter, and he was strengthened. And what did the Lord do? Why, softened Esau's heart, and Esau began to see that he had better let Jacob alone, he had better not injure him, he had better make friendship with him, he had better be kind to him. That was the most sensible thing, perhaps, that Esau ever did in his life. And so, Esau so far from injuring Jacob, fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept, and all that family, social, brotherly feeling of affection natural to them came into operation, and the devil was put out of the council, and the counsel of God stood, and Jacob came off not only free, without being injured, but something more. Now, said Jacob, not only has Esau kindly received me, not only have I escaped that which I thought I should fall under, not only has the Lord done this, but as Mount Seir is not far from where I dwell, as the dwellings are not very far apart, it is a great comfort to me that Esau will not come to where I am to injure me, so that I am now not only escaped for the time being, but Esau is evidently turned into a friend. And so, Esau remained. And many years after this, Isaac, their father, died; and Jacob and Esau, who were both of them then aged men, both of them than a hundred and twenty years old when Isaac died, they were both at the funeral, both Jacob and Esau. Esau saw it was his policy to be friendly, and Jacob knew it was the Lord that did it; and so, Jacob could bear testimony, as he well did in his dying hour, "The God which fed me all my lifelong." Laban would have starved me, but my God would not let him do it; Esau would have killed me, but my God would not let him do it; and so "the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." Here, then, is the care the Lord will take of his. Thus, then, Laban lost nothing by being friendly. And if I am speaking to any this morning that know not the Lord, and if you have a friendly feeling toward the people of God and the cause of God, you will lose nothing by it. I should advise you to be friendly, advise you attempt to do them no harm, and I should advise you to dwell among them all you can, and go and hear the word all you can. Who know what mercy may drop into your souls some day? I suppose even now you think to yourselves (I am speaking to them that have a friendly feeling, and yet know they don't know the Lord savingly), they are not hypocrites; we ought not to say anything disrespectful of such men; they are simply sincere, honest, upright men among men, and they like the people of God as far as they can see something that is admirable about them); I suppose even now you think to yourselves sometimes: Well, after all, I am not a Christian, but I should like to be one; I am not really born of God; but I should like to be one; I do not know anything of pardoning mercy, nor of justification before God; I don't know what fellowship is with God, but I should like to. I dare to say the people that go and hear the word where I go, they see what I do not see, and feel what I do not feel, and understand what I do not understand, and they have a hope that I have not; and that sermon, I like that man, I like his honest and straightforward manner; but then I want something beyond that, I want to know that this God is my God. Well, you will lose nothing by that, depend upon it; and if you are friendly to the cause, even a cup of cold water shall not lose its reward. Depend upon it, the Lord is better than you think he is, any little kindness done to his people is done unto him, and, as I have said, shall in no wise lose its reward. Pharaoh lost nothing by his kindness to Joseph. He brought Joseph out of prison, listened to his interpretation, believed in and acted upon that interpretation, and Pharaoh lost nothing by it; he preserved his thdddrone,

preserved his kingdom, preserved his people, and lived in peace. It is true another king arose that knew not Joseph, but still, this Pharaoh did, and showed kindness to Joseph, and he lived in peace. All I am showing now is, that while the Lord takes care of his people, he will show his approbation of any kindness that is done unto them. If then, he will show his approbation of kindness done by them that do it out of mere natural kindness, without any saving knowledge of him, how much more will the Lord appreciate kindnesses that the Lord's people show one to the other. And he will requite their unkindness's too. The Lord has a rod in his hand. I do not believe that one child of God can willfully do another child of God any harm without having the rod for it. What father of a family would see one child injure another, or trying to do so, without interposing? Where would be the order, where would be the safety, where would be the peace? For the people of God have an old man in them as well as a new one. I would no more trust a Christian when a Christian is left to himself; I would no more trust him, I have seen some Christians as malicious, I don't say against the truth, but as malicious against some of the persons of the people of God on account of some little circumstance, as ever I have seen a worldly man. It is a disgrace to you when it is so, any of you. I have no particular person in view; I don't know anyone here; I hope there is not one; but if there be one, I would only say, you may depend upon it, it will all recoil upon yourself. "If any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed." So then, Joseph's counsel was wise; "See that you fall not out by the way." And the apostle's counsel is wise when he says, "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another."

"Something, every day they live,
To pity, and perhaps forgive."

And the Savior's counsel bears upon the same thing; which he dwells upon very much; "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." "Walk in love one to another." And he tells us what the secret of this brotherly love is; he says, "Continue in my love; continue in me." And so, if we continue in Christ's perfection, we shall continue in the love of the brethren. This is simply the secret of the long, and, I had almost said, uninterrupted, prosperity we have had now for thirty years, here at the Surrey Tabernacle. The Lord has kept us as a people; he has kept us in this decision for what Christ has done; there we stand, there we are, and I would rather my breath should stop now, I say it in all soberness, before I leave the pulpit this morning, than I should live to see the day that I should enter into affinity with duty-faith men, free-will men, or in any shape or form sanction that which I believe to be hostile to the liberty of the gospel, deceptive to the souls of men, obscuring to the glories of Christ, and an insult to God. I feel I would rather my breath should stop than I should live to see the day that I should compromise one particle of God's truth. I love the brethren, only *they must be brethren*, it must be in Christ. If it be good and pleasant to dwell together, it must be in Christ; it must be the unity, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit; it must be the unity of truth, and not of error; it must be the unity of vitality, and not of formality. Thus, then, we see that if the Lord's people have enemies, how the Lord overthrows those enemies, and how he sometimes turns an enemy into a friend. Who would have thought that Pharaoh would have been such a friend to Joseph? The Lord made him a friend. And Joseph did not turn round and as it were, throw dirt in Pharaoh's face, and say, ah, Pharaoh, I do not thank you for being my friend; you could not help yourself. That would have been ignorance, insolence, presumption, vulgarity, and everything despicable. If a man that knows God to be your friend, if the Lord turn him into a friend, treat him kindly, treat him respectfully, acknowledge his

excellencies; that's the way to get on, depend upon it. If you do a kindness, you like it to be acknowledged. I know not any quality more despicable than that of ingratitude. But with people sometimes, the more kindness you show them, the more liberties they take with you, and the more demands they make upon you, and that in that intruding sort of way that you are obliged to keep such persons at arm's length, whether you would or not. Joseph did not act like this. See the respectful way in which he carried himself towards Pharaoh. When his father came, Joseph wished some of the royal servants to ask of Pharaoh a favor, that Pharaoh would see his father. See the respectful way in which Jacob treated Pharaoh, "How old are you.?" Pharaoh said. Well, he said, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil years of my have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their their pilgrimage." He treated Pharaoh respectfully, and Pharaoh consequently treated Jacob very kindly, and all his children kindly, and gave them the best portion of the land to dwell in. Why, my hearer, we do not know what worldly man's friendship we may need; we do not know whose kindness we may need; and, therefore, while we stand out for the truth we will not personally, nor intentionally, offend any man; but, as much as lies in us, live peaceably with all men; but when we come to matters of truth, then we will speak out that truth boldly, yet in love to the truth and in love to the souls of men. Nebuchadnezzar never lost anything by being kind to Daniel, and if Nebuchadnezzar had abode in the position which he first took on Daniel's interpretation of his dream, Nebuchadnezzar would not have been subjected to what he was; but unhappily, Nebuchadnezzar listened to enemies, and he lighted up the fiery furnace, got away into his native pride, and God turned him for seven years into a beast, yet brought him to his senses at last. And I am sure Mordecai lost nothing by standing out decided as he did.

Now, *the Lord's people ultimately cannot be hurt*, and, of course, cannot be killed. They can never die. They have a life that will never die. I may, in conclusion show that there are four, shall I call them impersonal persons that all the people of God, more or less dread, and yet that not anyone of these four shall be able ultimately to hurt us, but they must be killed; and yet one of these four is not impersonal either, because he is a person. The first is that of sin. Sin has done us infinite mischief; sin has ruined us; sin has entailed eternal woe; and eternity of wretchedness, bitterness and misery, sin has involved us in. And yet, the living God has taken such an advantage of this that he has taken occasion hereby to show the exceeding riches of his grace, so that ultimately, we shall be none the worse for having been sinners; we shall be none the worse for what sin did for us in the fall, nor for what sin had done for us in our lives; all is ended, all must die out and our souls must live. So that sin, that does such infinite mischief, shall ultimately do no harm; that is, its sting is taken away, its mischief over-ruled, for the display of the riches of the grace of God. Then, secondly, Satan; "He has destroyed him that has the power of death, the devil;" he can do us no ultimate harm.