

# GOOD SIGNS

## A SERMON

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“And speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:3

THE Savior, now in his risen state, was on the right side of death; he was on that side of death in which he could look at death as having passed away and passed away forever. We, at present, are on the wrong side of death; we have it to endure; but if one with his death, the time will come when we also shall be on the right side of death; yes, virtually, if one with him, we are already, because by what he has endured, the bitterness of death is past, the sting is taken away. He was on the right side of sin; before he died, he was on the unconquered side of sin, he had to bear sin, to conquer sin, to be a sin-offering, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. But now he is on the right side of sin, he is on the conquered side now; he sees now sin is gone and gone forever; there is no more remembrance of sin, there shall be no more conscience of sin, no more offering for sin. He is now on the right side of the curse; for he was once on that side of the curse in which the heavens before him were clothed with sackcloth, and ready to break forth in all their terrible thunders and lightnings, culminating, concentrating in his wondrous person. But he has endured all that; he is now on the right side of the curse; the curse is gone, and he looks at the curse now as Samson looked at the lion after he had slain him: it is passed away and gone forever, and there shall be no more curse. He is now on the right side, shall I say, of the powers of darkness. He once had the dragon to meet; he once had the head of the old serpent to bruise; but he has met the dragon, he has slain the dragon, he has bruised the serpent's head, and now he stands on the vantage ground of conquest complete, of victory entire, and of freedom eternal; his foes can never rise again. In human victories foes rise again and again; but not so in the victory he has brought, he has so conquered what he has conquered, that they shall rise no more forever. He is now on the right side of tribulation. All his tribulations, sorrows, and griefs are now passed away, and they are passed away forever. He can now see all these clouds gone off, and now there is a morning without clouds; now eternal sunshine settles on his head; now he sorrows no more; and, as says the apostle, he dies no more, death has no more dominion over him. Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul should desire to enjoy this blessedness of Christ's resurrection? “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.” and notice what the Savior says upon this subject; “Father, I will that those whom you have given me be with me where I am.” and when we are enabled to take our stand in oneness with him, and thus see death passed away, sin passed away, the curse passed away, the powers of

darkness passed away, tribulations passed away, all tears virtually wiped away from off all faces and nothing before us but the fountain of living waters, the living God, the living Lamb in the midst of the throne, our souls charmed with the shade and leaves and fruit of the tree of life, what a wonderous scene does it present! All we want is that described by the Apostle when he says, "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord." And the more a poor, sensible, self-condemned, lost, helpless sinner, who is conscious of this state, is enabled to meditate upon what Christ has done, the sweeter your meditations will be. Who then shall undertake to describe the gladness, the pleasure, the joy, with which the Savior now spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God? He could never speak of them before as he spoke of them now, because he always spoke of them before mingled with sorrow, with groans, mingled with tears, mingled with distress, mingled with castings down as he himself explains, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful." but now all these, by his own atoning worth, are passed away, the kingdom is established, his people are save; and this is that in which he will glory, and the people shall glory, and that forever.

Our subject then, this morning, will be that of *the kingdom of God*; and though we have no lengthened account of the things the Savior said pertaining to this eternal kingdom of God, yet there are some things which he said after his resurrection which we may notice as a kind of sample of the way in which he spoke of this kingdom. I shall try, therefore, this morning, to set forth those things that pertain to the kingdom of God, that are indicated to us after his resurrection.

I shall notice this morning simply *the signs that accompany his kingdom, by which the subjects of that kingdom are distinguished from all other people*. And the signs which he has presented to us we of course must take spiritually. I do not say that they have not in some cases a literal meaning; but our chief object will be this morning to take them spiritually; and in taking those signs spiritually, they do, as just indicated, distinguish the subjects of Christ's kingdom from all other people. And I think the longer we live the more we shall see the importance of looking well to the great matter of the Holy Spirit's work in the heart. We live in a day when people tell us that we should look to Christ, and go to Christ; but after all, we are met with the declaration, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Therefore, if our coming to Christ has not this at the root thereof, then we are not plants of God's right-hand planting; and "Every plant which my Father has not planted shall be rooted up." Now those signs the Savior thus presents. He says, "They shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; and they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. These are the signs which the Savior has given. First that they shall cast out devils. I have sometimes said, and I just repeat the observation now, that there are in the Greek language two different words translated by the one English word devil; and in the scripture I have just now mentioned, the original word there would be rendered more properly by the word *demon*; and these demons were the heathen gods of old; their gods were called demons. So that to cast out devils has special reference to false religions. This is the idea there intended, then, as the very first thing. Hence, we find that all those men in olden times that fear the Lord, they sided with the Lord, and in contrast to all false gods. Let me just give an example or two, and that will show how it accords with the work of the Holy Spirit, that brings a sinner out of all delusions; for these false gods were a figure of false gospels. If I receive a false gospel then I receive a false spirit; and if I receive a false spirit, then I receive a false Christ; and then my religion is false, and I am deceived; and instead of being safe, I shall be lost at last. Now, in the last chapter of the Book of Joshua,

Joshua is there cautioning the people against false gods, showing what the Lord is, in contrast to false gods; and there is that one named upon which I will not now enlarge, which is worthy of our attention as a name by which the Lord then stood so distinguished. So, Joshua, when speaking of the false gods, and showing the vanity of them, says, "As for me and my house, we will serve *Jehovah*." I thus render the original literally, because it throws a little light upon it, "As for me and my house, we will serve *Jehovah*. Our fathers on the other side of the flood, the other side of the Euphrates, before the Lord called them by his grace, they worshipped other gods; and you see that nations worship other gods; but as for me and my house, we will worship *Jehovah*. Here is God in his eternity. Let us look now a little closely into this. What is the first thing, for instance in the feeling of a convicted sinner, that distresses him? It is eternity. Here, he says, is eternity. I am a sinner, and I have eternity to meet. Eternity! What a fearful sound! If my sins are unatoned for, my soul unregenerate, if I die unforgiven, unsanctified, unwashed, unjustified, then there I am lost, and lost forever. So that, as eternity is one of the feelings of his mind, he wants some remedy that accords with eternity. In the Lord's own time is revealed unto such a one Christ's eternity; that there is in the redemption of Christ, eternity, he has obtained for us eternal redemption. That there is in the salvation of Christ eternity, everlasting salvation. That there is in Christ's righteousness eternity, everlasting righteousness. That there is in the victory which he has achieved eternity. That there is in the love of God eternity, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, in loving-kindness have I drawn you." There is in the mercy of God eternity. Now, then, such a one, what does he do? Why, he casts out all demons or false gods. He casts out the doctrines of free-will and universal redemption. I myself, for a time, tried Wesleyanism, till I found that it was all delusion from beginning to end; and though the people are sincere, yet the religion itself is a delusion; and I felt that unless Christ's work was eternally perfect, that unless God was eternal in his mercy, and immutable in his love, there could be no hope for me. And then there is, in connection with this, an eternal covenant, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. Now this is one of the signs that are to attend the progress of the Saviors kingdom; that is, you are to receive the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, in the eternity of it; for all true religion must have eternity for its root, for its base, whether it be our religion as it is for us, but whether it be our religion as it is in us. If we look at our religion as it is for us, then it is to us eternally the same, revealing the immutability of his counsel; and then, if we speak of our religion as in us, then it is "You are born again of an incorruptible seed, that lives in abides forever." And thus, you will cast out all false gospels, all gospels which do not accord with this perfection of Christ, this eternity of God's mercy, and immutability of his counsel. You will cast them all out; you will stand against them all, and, with Joshua, say "As for me, I will serve *Jehovah*." And so, you will side with the everlasting gospel, you will side with that gospel that was the same yesterday as it is today and will be the same forever as it is now. Here, now, the scene has changed. You may not dread eternity now, but rejoice therein; you may not shrink back from eternity now, but hasten there to; you may not tremble at its approach now, but press forward, for there lies your prize; you may not draw back now, but look forward and hasten into the coming of the day of God; and though the heavens shall be on fire, and the earth and the works there and be burned up, and all these things be dissolved, it is to make way for you to enter into the keeping of that eternal sabbath that remains unto the people of God. What say you, then, fellow traveler to eternity? Are you thus brought to know something of eternity being a dread to you? And are you brought into such a consciousness of your state, that nothing but a remedy that is eternal could be of any use to you? You know your works are not eternal. You may look at your own doings, there is no stamina in them. They are all excellent for temporal purposes, for benevolent, sympathetic, and adorning and testifying purposes, but they

will never do for salvation purposes; they will never do for that. That Jesus Christ occupied that position; let God be your salvation; that his mercy be the river that is full of water that will flow on to all eternity.

But second, they shall speak with new tongues. What is this new tongue? For as the casting out of demons refers by reflex to the Old Testament saints, who cast out the false gods, and abode by the truth, so every one of the Saints bears an allusion to the same Old Testament scriptures or circumstances; and I will bring Old Testament scriptures to every one of the signs, to show you that there is nothing new in these signs the Savior has your set before us.

Now, where shall we go, then, for the new tongues? Why, say you that refers to the day of Pentecost. I have no objection to admit that; but that is a question more of gifts in the first place than of grace; and we are dealing this morning with vitalities, essentials. I go to the last chapter of Zephaniah, and there I get the new tongues. "Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." A praying heart is something new; it is a new tongue. "God be merciful to me a sinner," is something new. "Behold, I am vile," is something new. "If you will, you can make me clean," is something new. Yes, when a sinner is thus brought into the spirit of grace and supplication, here is a new tongue; he speaks with a new tongue; he speaks of his sin, and of his state as a sinner, as he never spoke before. Here is something new. Go then, Ananias, to Saul of Tarsus, and you will see something new; and if you ask what that something new is, it is this; "Behold he prays." He had, no doubt, said many prayers during his long pharisaic profession, but now he not merely said prayers, but "Behold, he prays." It is something new. He prays now for mercy; he pleads now atoning blood; he pleads now justifying righteousness; he pleads now the exceeding great and precious promises of God. That is the pure language. Says Job, "My prayer is pure." I am not praying from any formal, hypocritical, worldly purpose, show, or display, like the Pharisee, making long prayers that he might be seen of men; but I am praying to the Lord, that he might have mercy upon me, with all sincerity and all simplicity, with the single object of obtaining mercy; and, says such an one, I am glad to find it written, that "he that calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Again, I am glad to find it written, that one says, "I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication." Ah, what was your state, and what was your supplication? Why, "the sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech you, deliver my soul." That is the new tongue. Know you anything of this new language? They shall speak with new tongues.

Ah, see the swearer, see the profligate, see the hardened wretch. Look at him now, trembling, brought on the knee of prayer, and ere long, shall be brought into the pure liberty of the gospel, and rejoice in the atoning and sin-cleansing blood; for a praying heart is certainly a prelude to a singing one; for, "Blessed are they that mourn, they shall be comforted." your sorrow shall be turned into Joy. "And that they may serve me with one consent;" there is no hesitation about it; they all agreed to admit the truth of God, and the Christ of God, and the counsel of God, and the glory of God.

But we have not done yet with this new tongue. Not only does this new tongue signify the spirit of grace and supplication, and willingness to serve the Lord. I like that expression "They shall serve him with one consent;" not a mere outward consent, but the real consent of the heart; as says

the Apostle, "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in your heart", let us have the heart and make the confession, and then let us see whether the heart is in it, "and believe in your heart", really so, "that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." but this new tongue also means a clear knowledge mediation; "the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea;" that was a tongue of bondage; they were slaves; "with his mighty wind." There is the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came from heaven as a mighty rushing wind, "shall he shake his hand over the river and shall smite it with the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod."

Now, here is the tongue of bondage destroyed, the yoke of bondage destroyed, the spirit of bondage destroyed; the Holy Spirit thus comes. And what were these seven streams of the ancient Nile of Egypt but a type of those streams of sin and death and the curse, that rolled between us and God? but by what the Savior has done these are all dried up, "make men go over dry shod." They shall go over as though there was no water there, there is none; and so you shall have access to God, as though there was no sin, so completely is sin dried up; have access to God, as though there was no curse, so completely is the curse dried up; have access to God, as though there was no wrath, so completely is the wrath dried up; have access to God, as though there was no death, so completely shall death be dried up. Ah, what a new language this will be! this will be a new state of things; this will be a new tongue. Ah, say you, I never thought of living to see such a day as this; what a day is this! this is, indeed, as David says, "He has put a new song into my mouth;" he has opened up a new and living way; old things are passed away, all things are become new; and they are become new to remain new; they will never grow old. If it be said of the Israelites that their raiment waxed not old upon them, neither did their shoes wax old upon their feet, nor their feet swell, if that be said temporally, literally, of the Israelites, how much, more will the doctrine contained in those words apply to the real Christian, whose raiment is immortal, and whose shoes shall be as iron and brass? As his day is, so shall his strength be.

Here, then, demons are cast out, a new language acquired, old things pass away, and all things become new. I could say a great deal about the old tongue polished up in a new fashion; but I will not. There is a great deal of old Adam gospel in our day. Poor old Adam, he is brushed up, and trimmed up, and propped up, and dressed up, and painted up, and worked up, and nursed up, and held up, and preached up, and prayed up, and cried up, it is but an old Adam concern when they have done. The leprosy is in the soul, and the body, and garments, and all. Down with the whole of it, let it all pass away. As the Apostle says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." We must have everything new; none of the old materials will do. Why, our very bodies, in order to be bodies in the right sense of the word, must come to the dust, and from the dust they shall rise and in immortality, and in incorruptibility; and then, with immortal souls, the mortal body is,

"In a song forever new,  
this glorious theme we still pursue,  
throughout the azure sky."

Again, they shall take up serpents. The Apostle did this literally on one occasion, when the viper fastened upon his hand, and it shook the beast off into the fire, and felt no harm. Every Christian knows something of this, especially ministers; there are plenty of vipers to fasten upon a minister's hand; he shakes one off, and shakes other off, and he feels no harm. I should think the viper felt

rather uncomfortable there; depend upon it, he was pretty well roasted; and if he had got out, I am sure he would not have fastened upon Paul again; he would rather have run a thousand miles another way. And so it is, when a man is tempted to injure a minister of God, or a child of God, or the cause of God, you know that's not what he does; it is not the mighty fortress against which you are coming that will be injured, but it is yourself that will be broken to pieces, and not the cornerstone at which you are stumbling. By passing by the letter, and taking it mystically, we may go to the Old Testament to get an explanation of this taking up serpents. Taking up serpents means they shall overcome their wily cunning foes. The serpent is a very cunning thing, and a great many cunning men lie in wait to deceive, and, if it were possible, should deceive the very, what a pity the next word is there! Well, I didn't put it there. You see what honor is put upon that despised word, upon that hated word, that terrible word, that dangerous word, that narrow-minded word, that wonderful word; what honor is put upon it, "If it were possible, they should deceive even the very *elect*." But that they cannot do; they are brought into God's eternity, and brought into this new kingdom, to speak with new tongues, and to understand this new language, and none can deceive them. "The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." But the taking up of serpents means to overcome them," 91st Psalm; "You shall tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet." Who is the man that shall do this? The man that loves a covenant God; hence the following words: "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him." Look into your heart, Christian, and see, do you love Jesus? do you love a covenant God? do you love his blessed gospel? have you this spirit of grace and supplication? If so, then he will deliver you; and you will need deliverances all your days, you will need deliverance in a dying hour, you will need deliverance at the last great rising day. "Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known my name." Here, then, as the Savior says, "You shall tread on serpents and on scorpions; and I give you power over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." So, then, this is sign, the third that is to attend the progress of this kingdom; you are to cast out false gods or demons; you are to speak in the language of prayer and meditation, new tongue; you are to overcome all the cunning, and power, and forces of the adversary, and stand fast in the truth against all the wiles of the devil, and having done all, to stand.

The fourth is, that if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. Deadly things, and that is this: you will have a great many deadly things to drink. All our afflictions may be looked upon as deadly things. The Lord puts a cup into your hand of affliction, you must drink it. Say you, it will kill me. No, it won't. It is grievous, I know it is, it is a cup of trembling, a cup of affliction, a cup of distress! You sip and sip, and drink no more than you are forced to do; but we must all have our share of affliction, one kind or another, losses and crosses and bereavement; and when in our right mind we shall say "The cup which my heavenly Father has given me, shall I not drink it? "It is his will I should be thus afflicted; it is as well I should have this lost; it is as well I should undergo this bereavement; it is well I should be subjected to this distress; it is his hand that puts the cup into my hand. It kills my earthly comforts, my natural pleasures, it kills a great many of my earthly hopes; ah, Lord, it is a bitter cup; but the good John Bunyan says, "it will make the sweet the sweeter when the sweet shall come. And, besides when Lazarus had all the cups of bitterness which he had to drink, it will be only in this life; after that, there is no more bitter; Lazarus has received all those cups of bitters on this side of the grave, and now he is comforted on every side, and now there is nothing for him but the cup of salvation, the cup of consolation, the cup of eternal delight. Where is the there a Christian that has not this cup of bitters? And yet, notice the Lord's words, "it

shall not hurt you.” Does not this accord with other scriptures, where it is said that all things work for good; and with another scripture, where it says that these afflictions “should work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.” It shall not do us any ultimate harm. The Lord knows how much and how many bitters we need; he knows what intensity of bitterness to give, and he knows how to mitigate the bitterness as shall seem good in his sight. Hence one of old, when she drank the bitter cup, lost her husband and her two sons, came home lamenting and said, “Call me no more Naomi,” that which is pleasant for things have been anything but pleasant with me; I have had a bitter cup for it these ten years to drink; “Call me Mara”, bitter; for the almighty has dealt very bitterly with me;” therefore, call me not Naomi. But the Lord turned her captivity, took that cup of bitters out of her hand put into her hand the cup of salvation. It is a great thing to have grace to say, “Father, your will be done; for, after all, if he guides the sparrow’s flight, and if the hairs of the head of his people be numbered, then none of these things come by chance, they are all ordered by his hand. And hence it was, Job, when he was called upon to drink that bitter cup, he recognized the hand that put it into his hand; “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” And when Job’s wife spoke as she did, he said, “Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?” Will this cup of bitters hurt me? No; it seems to hurt me now, it afflicts me now, it makes me curse the day of my birth now, makes my spirit bitter, embitters everything, embitters my very existence, but the Lord can sweeten it all; and so he did; he turned the captivity, he took from him the cup of bitters, put into his hand the cup of consolation, and the sweetness was twice as strong in sweetness as the bitter was in bitterness; the one prepares for the other.

Alas, alas! unhappy mortals, we are so perverted by sin and the legal and other evils of our nature, that without some of these cups of bitters put into our hands we should not love the Lord; we should not thirst for him, and we should not recognize his mercies in the way we do. He knows, therefore, in all these things how to deal with us. And there is the beauty, if you look at it, there is a great beauty in the order of these signs taken singly, but to my mind there is a great beauty in the order of them. First, here are demons cast out, And the man is brought to side with the true God; secondly, here he is brought into a new language, a new experience, a spirit of grace and supplication, and a knowledge of mediation; third, being thus brought to side with the true God, and brought into this new language, he is now prepared to stand against the delusions of the enemy; he is now by what he knows of the Lord, to tread underfoot the serpent, the scorpion, and the power of the enemy; he is now prepared for the deadly thing; he is now prepared for tribulation; he is now prepared to be tried; and this is the way in which the Lord will try his people, in order that they might know what is in their hearts, and be more rooted and grounded in the truth as it is in Jesus. There is a beauty, therefore, in my estimation at least, in the order of these signs.

And then, the last is, they, the prophets, and apostles, we might embrace the whole, shall lay their hands on the sick, and they shall recover them. Now, they did that, the apostles did that literally; but the literal was nothing in comparison with the spiritual. You know what the Savior says about the literal and the spiritual. “He that believes on me the works that I do, he shall he do also, and greater works than these, because I go to my father.” Greater works? Yes. Take it in this way; The Savior heals that man of his leprosy; Ananias is sent to instrumentally minister pardoning mercy, obtaining mercy, to Saul of Tarsus. Now which was the greater work of the two? That which cleansed and healed the soul of Saul of Tarsus, or that which healed the body of the leper? So, when the Lord open the blind eyes, that was a great work; but when a minister is sent to open the

eyes of the blind sinner, and to bring him to a saving knowledge of the truth, that is a greater work still. The Savior fed the multitude with loaves and fishes; and that was a great work; but for a man to feed the multitude of souls with the bread of eternal life, and to be the means of leading men into the straightway of truth, by the rivers of water, where they shall drink of the water of eternal life, is a greater work still; because the one is temporal, passes away; the other is eternal. This is what I understand, then, by the Savior saying, "The works that I do shall they do also, and greater works than these." The spiritual is greater than the temporal because the spiritual pertains to the soul and is eternal. And yet, our nature just turns things upside down. We run to all the physicians in the Metropolis to get rid of any bodily affliction; but the soul, let that be in what state it may, if God does not make us conscious of it, and stir us up to cry for the Great Physician, we care nothing for the soul. I had almost said and make no apology for saying it, that even with real Christians, if the Lord cared no more for our souls than we care for them ourselves, we should come badly off. So that, really, if we are preserved, and if we get safe at last, I am sure, in that department, as well as every other department, we must say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto your name be all the glory." He waters it every moment. Do we watch every moment? I confess I do not. He keeps it night and day. Am I always upon the alert? I confess I am not. I love a watchful spirit, and I pray for a watchful spirit, because I know it is a scriptural spirit, and a profitable and a good spirit. I don't like a chapter to pass by me without teaching me something; and I don't like a sermon to pass by me without bringing me something; nor you either, when at all in your right mind. Hence, every minister wishes his hearers to watch him as narrowly as possible, in order to see if there is any word from the throne of God. The minister knows not precisely the state of the people; but if he is led so to speak as to come just where they are, describe what they are, and point out the remedy, so that they say, Ah, I can see this; I can trace these things out; I can see that the Lord has brought me to side with himself; I can see he has given me this pure language of prayer; I can see he has given me this language of mediation; I can see he has given me power over the enemy, the enemy has not been able to sever me from the truth; I can see that although I have drank many deadly things, many bitter things, yet I can already testify, that many of those things have done me good; they have brought me, it is true, into the house of mourning, and it has been trying; for the time; but it has made me pray more earnestly; it was with the Lord of all as with his members; he, being in agony, prayed the more earnestly. And so, when the Lord is pleased to afflict us, he thereby, by those things, increases in intensity in our souls the spirit of grace and of supplication.

The last sign is recovery from sickness. I think that is a nice winding up, is it not? It is a lovely representation. What is the ultimate object of the gospel? To heal all diseases, to make up the breach; there shall not be a wound, a scar, a spot, a wrinkle left. Poor Job said, "He has filled me with wrinkles." a very good thing too. He has filled you with wrinkles; he has made an ugly old man of you. And so, when God convinces a sinner of what he is as a sinner, he says, what an old sinner I am; why I am as old in my sinner-ship as Adam; I became a sinner when he sinned; I am a poor, wrinkled, withered old sinner; that is what I am. Well, Job here is your remedy. "He loved the church and gave himself for it."