

A STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS

A SERMON

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“Lift up now your eyes and see what is this that goes forth.” Zechariah
5:5

OUR text is a part of an apparently mysterious sort of vision or parable. Here is an ephah, and this ephah goes forth, and is said to be the resemblance of the people through all the earth. You then have a woman sitting in the midst of this ephah, and you then have a talent of lead thrown upon this ephah. Now this part of the parable or vision I have named last is, perhaps, as far as I shall get this morning. And it is for the sake of the contrasts which this vision suggests that I felt decided in taking these words. And therefore, in running through the four parts I have just glanced at, I will notice, first, *the ephah*; secondly, *the representation*, for the Lord says, “This is their resemblance through all the earth;” third, *the position of the woman*, sitting in the midst of the ephah; and, fourth, *the judgment of God upon the same*, that there was the weight of lead thrown upon the ephah, upon the mouth thereof.

First, then, I notice *the ephah*, which, as you are aware, was a measure, holding perhaps not quite a bushel; but that matters not, the precise measurement; measurement is the idea there intended. Now, this ephah is wickedness; this ephah is a system of apostasy from God, as we shall see more clearly in the sequel, though to that sequel I shall not come this morning. It is, therefore, a figure setting forth that cunningly devised system by which men undertake to measure out to others what kind of religion theirs is to be. And we have the same doctrine taught, the same thing set forth, in the 17th of the Revelation under the figure of a golden cup. Hence, the false church there is represented as having in her hand a golden cup, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication. You must understand that the abominations there are false doctrines, and that the contents of that golden cup intoxicated people that drank of it. And so in all ages error has intoxicated the mind, hence, here I can hardly forbear going back to the one great event, that when Satan first got Eve, shall I say, to drink of this cup, when he had got her to be partaker of this delusion, what intoxication of mind then were they subjected to! they thought they had found something better than God. Now then, this ephah, being a measure, is to show the limitation of the enemy. Let us then here, as I have before observed, just notice the contrast. It indicates, in the first place, the limitation of the enemy, that it is limited to this measure. And what a mercy it is for the people of God! and I will point out presently what their limitation is; indeed, I will set before you

three limitations, if I may call them limitations, and see how they contrast with this one. Now, what a mercy it is for us that the enemy is thus limited, that sin is limited, that Satan is limited, that death is limited! Death cannot kill us before the time, and death can kill us only once; that is a great mercy too. "It is appointed unto men once to die;" but when death has killed us once, it can kill us no more. All enemies, therefore, are limited. And so, you will find that the false church in her delusions is limited. "All shall worship her," all shall drink of this stream which issues from the serpent's mouth, and he carried away into eternal perdition, "except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." Electing grace steps in and enlightens the minds of the people of God in a way that no others are. You observe, then, the enemy is thus limited. "They would deceive, if possible, the very elect." And so, in all our tribulations, for I must dwell a moment or two longer here, in all our tribulations the enemy is limited. It is very difficult to believe that we have only just that measure of tribulation which the Lord designed for us, because we are very often the cause of our own tribulations; at least, I have been in many instances of mine: some of you are blessed with more wisdom, and therefore perhaps escape a great many things that a poor blind thing like myself steps into. But so, it is. I am not a fatalist; I am not that; I hate that doctrine; but I am a predestinarian, and I believe in divine absolute decree, and in divine sufferance. I do not believe the Lord decreed anything that is sinful, anything that is erroneous, or anything that is wrong; but I believe he permits it, that he suffers it. Hence, I do not believe that the Lord stirred up Satan, I cannot see that, that he did by any influence stir up Satan to treat Job in the way he did; but Satan had his eye upon Job, and the Lord knew he had, and said, "Have you considered my servant Job?" Of course, he had. Hence Satan came in upon Job, but it was with limitations; and though wave followed upon wave very rapidly, yet he was limited; and we see the end, how the captivity of Job was turned. Here then let it be our consolation that this ephah, simple as it is for the woman, the false church, to sit in the midst of the ephah, that it sets forth the measurement of limitation; that everything the people of God have to endure, their sins, their troubles, Satan, death, everything is limited. But we shall have presently, in contrast to this, to remind you of One who is not limited at all. Thus, then, this ephah is the measurement of limitation. I do not know anything more comforting to my mind than this; there is something very pleasing about it, and it encourages us in our faith in, and our hope in the Lord our God. Now the enemy then is measured by the measurement of limitation. The people of God are also measured, for I must come to them now; but they are measured with a measurement of perfection. They are perfectly holy in Christ, they are perfectly righteous in Christ, they are perfectly saved in Christ; and they shall come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of a man in Christ; and when that which is in part is done away, then that which is perfect is come. Thus, the enemy is measured by the measurement of limitation; "Hitherto shall you come, and no further." The child of God is measured by the measurement of perfection; the child of God shall not stop short of perfection. First, the real Christian is perfect in his heart, that is, perfect in his decision for God's truth. What perfection reigns there! Place the Christian by the side of what Jesus Christ has done, how perfectly his heart is one with it! Place the Christian by the side of the teachings of the Holy Spirit, bringing home the truth with power, and that nothing else can satisfy him but divine teachings, how perfect his heart is with it! Nothing short of power. The Christian, the real Christian, will not know the speech of them that are puffed up but the power. The real Christian can stop short of nothing but the power of godliness; he longs after, and his heart is one with that power of godliness described by the apostle when he says, "That the power of Christ may rest upon me."

When his power rests upon us, it weakens other powers, it dissolves other powers, casts out other powers, and we rejoice then that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. The Christian is not only measured with the measure of perfection that is in Christ, and with the law of perfection in his heart, for the Lord will have nothing short of a perfect heart, he will not have a wavering heart; he will not have a halfway heart; he will have all the heart or none. "My son, give me your heart;" and when we are favored, in the experience of it, to feel with the poet:

"You have my heart, it shall be yours,
Your it shall ever be;"

we rejoice, then, that while the enemy is measured by the measurement of limitation, we are measured by the measurement of perfection that is in Christ, and that measurement of decision that is in the heart. "They came to David with perfect heart;" and so "as many of us," says the apostle, "as be perfect, let us be thus minded." Bless the Lord, that while I have a poor, old, broken-down, fallen, leprous, wicked, deceitful, wretched, miserable, worthless, burdensome nature within me, the old man of sin, yet in the midst of this there is a solemn, living decision for the truth; that my heart, I do believe with all my soul that my heart is as perfect now with God's truth as it will be in heaven. I do not know so much of it as I then shall, and I do not enjoy so much of it as I then shall; but I believe my heart is as perfect in decision for him now as it will be in heaven. I laugh to scorn all other gospels; I trample upon all other systems. Give me this decision; there I am at home, and there I am happy. Then, again, the saints of God are measured by the measurement not only of that perfection that is in Christ, and this heart-perfection of decision, but also prospective perfection. "When that which is in part shall be done away, then that which is perfect shall come." So that, bless the Lord! the blest Redeemer will present us at the last great day by the measurement of perfection, and he himself is that pattern by which we shall be presented. But again. Now, while the false church and the enemy, and all his power, is measured by the measurement of limitation, and those who are brought to know their need of the Savior, and made decided for his truth, are measured by the measurement of perfection, now we have One that is measured only by two rules, and that one is the Lord Jesus Christ; and the two rules by which he is measured are infinity and eternity. He is bound nowhere; he reigns in infinity, he fills infinity. There is not a world that is not at his command; there is not a creature, from the invisible animalcule to the burning cherub before the throne, and all the intermediate grades, that are not immediately under his control. There is not an enemy on earth, nor a fallen angel, nor an angel in heaven, nor anything else, that is not immediately under his control, within the range of his government; for he fills infinity. He is God as well as man: he has indeed power over all flesh. Here, then, my hearer, Christ Jesus our God is not limited. The Lord help you to apply the following question to whatever difficulties you have, let them be what they may. **When I look thus at the infinity of the blessed God, the question I mean is, Is anything too hard for the Lord? I shall never get over this.** Oh yes, you will. I shall never get over that. Oh yes, you will. I shall never manage that. Oh yes, you will. That great mountain will never come down. Oh yes, it will. That dreadful valley will never so rise that I shall cross it. Oh yes, it will. Why, that rough, burning path will never be so smooth that I can get on. Many of these things are so crooked. "He has made my way crooked and enclosed my way with hewn stones." I shall never get out. Yes, you will. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Here, then, is the measurement of limitation to the enemy, the measurement of perfection to the Christian, the measurement of infinity to the Lord Jesus Christ. We glory, then, in the infinity that Jesus Christ fills, has entered into; and as the old saying is, and it is a true one, too, that his center is everywhere,

his circumference nowhere. The other rule by which he is measured is that of eternity. Can you put an end to him, or to his love? No. To the efficacy of his blood? No. Or to his righteousness, or to his kingdom, or to his mercy, or to his care? No. Is it not written, and shall it not be realized, "He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever"? He may seem sometimes to give us up to another; he may seem to do so; he may seem to suffer Satan to have dominion, as in the case of Job; circumstances to have dominion, and Pharaohs, and Nebuchadnezzar's, and Darius's to have dominion; it may seem so for a time, but it will not last long. No: Haman will not always reign; Haman will not always be able to make himself a terror to the Jews. No: Mordecai shall be exalted in due time, and the Jews shall have light and gladness, and a good day, and the Lord shall be on their side forever. Here, then, is the measurement of limitation to the enemy, the measurement of perfection to the friend, the measurement of infinity and eternity to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is gone into eternity; he lives in eternity; he reigns in eternity; he glories in eternity; he has filled eternity. Jesus Christ has by entering into eternity filled eternity with a fulness of joy; he has filled eternity with pleasures for evermore. "I go and prepare a place for you." What is it that prepares heaven? Why, it is the atonement and the presence of Jesus Christ. He was there with the Old Testament saints as God, and his atonement and his work were there in prediction and in promise; and on the ground of a sworn covenant, the Old Testament saints were there, and enjoyed the presence of the blessed God.

Thus, then, this simple simile suggests these contrasts. "What is this that goes forth?" Why, a system of error to delude men; but bless the Lord! it goes forth with limitations and shall not finally deceive those whose names are in the book of life. Then, suggested in the contrast that the measurement of the saints is the measurement, not of limitation, theirs is the measurement of perfection, but not of limitation. I cannot find any limitation to the inheritance of the saints; I cannot find it said of the saints, no, not in heaven, "Hitherto shall you come, and no further." Will you undertake to fathom the depths; will you undertake to measure the heights; will you undertake to range over the breadth; or will you undertake to comprehend the length of that inheritance which they have? If so, my answer is, that God himself is their inheritance. All their springs are in him. He is their exceeding joy. They limited? Why, I was going to say, they go anywhere there. God is love; and they dwell in God, and God in them, and love for ever reigns. Do you suppose that we are going to heaven to be shut up in a little bit of a room, or a field, or house, or place, and all thronged together, and hardly room to move? I have no such ideas as that myself. I believe that world to have immensity for its range, and where the soul and body too will be both elastic, immortal, incorruptible, and, for aught I know, like as angels, and fly with all the velocity and rapidity of lightning. It is a world of life and liveliness, a world of action, a world of communication, a world of communion, a world of blessedness. And I believe that the minister and the Christian too are more like the saints in heaven on those occasions when their souls, ere they are aware, make them like the chariots of Amminadib; when their souls are on the wing, and can range over the wonders of their incarnate God, can boast of his name, his mercy, and his salvation, and see every impediment virtually removed, and that all things that are opposing must be subservient to their welfare and to the glory of God. Then it is we have a little taste of that bliss that enables us to leave our cares behind. When I rose this morning I felt very miserable, and very cast down, and very unhappy, and wished it was not the Lord's day, and I wished I was not a minister, and I wished I had never existed; I felt very miserable; I felt very unhappy; I could not get a thought, I could not get a word, and I felt, Well, what would I give if I did not exist! I don't feel that I can preach today. Don't know how it is, my mind seems cast down; little cares seem to

be great ones; little hills seem to rise into great mountains; passing clouds look like a fixed tempest; I am very unhappy; I felt really as though I could not come to chapel. Presently the words came sweeter to my mind than they ever came before, I have always liked that hymn, but it is astonishing what a word will do,

“Surrounded with sorrows, temptations, and cares,
This truth with delight we survey,
And sing, as we pass through this valley of tears,
The righteous shall hold on his way.”

I began to be comfortable directly; I began to get a little light directly. I said, Lord, then I will go; your mercy is not gone, your promise does not fail, your power is still the same; I will go and make one more attempt. So it is; these are trying seasons, but they are all to make us feel that our springs are in the Lord, and that he leaves us sometimes to feel the weight of our cares and griefs and sorrows, to the end that we may know our need of a burden-bearer, and, being in agony, pray the more earnestly. So, it is when we are made thus earnestly to whisper out of the dust, how sweet then a word in season is! Bless the Lord, then, that such experiences are proofs that the enemy is measured with the measurement of limitation; but the saint measured, the Christian, the believer in Christ, measured with the measure of perfection; and that Jesus can be measured only by infinity and eternity. Happy portion! But we can get at these things only as the Holy Spirit is pleased to bring them into the soil. I can think of plenty of scriptures by the force of memory; but it is one thing to do this, and another thing for the Lord to bring them to mind. It is when he steps in that Satan is forced to go out.

But I will now come to the next part of our subject. Now this ephah of wickedness, this false system, was their resemblance through all the earth, or through all the land. Take the 23rd of Matthew, just one item upon that, and that is all, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men,” by taking away Christ’s atonement, and by taking away the Holy Spirit, who alone can regenerate the soul, and by taking away electing grace. So that this is their resemblance through all the land. They stand represented before God in their own religion, and their own religion is the worst part of their sins; their prayers are the worst part of their sins. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: therefore, you shall receive the greater damnation.” But as I just now hinted, it is the contrast I wish to avail myself of here as well, after what I have just said; think of it, for you to be represented to your Creator, your Judge, in that which he infinitely hates. Sin, in the common sense of the word, is infinitely hateful to him; but that organized system that sets aside his sovereignty, and sets aside in any measure his dear Son, and that sets aside the Holy Spirit of God, that system is doubly hateful to him, trebly hateful to him. Publicans and harlots, low and degraded and bad as they are, are not in their practice so hateful as that Pharisee that would thus pierce the Savior through and through, and destroy, if possible, both his truth and his people; so that the one gets into the kingdom of God, while the other is thus shut out. There is nothing so offensive to God as that which would distort or set aside his blessed truth, robbing God of that which is the most precious in his sight, and has been in all ages dear to every poor sinner convinced of his need of the same. But how are the people of God represented? Those that belong to the profane world have nothing to appear in before God but their profanity; those that belong to the empty professing world have nothing to appear in but their assumed profession, their arrogant

assumption of the Savior's name, and that system of error to which they may belong. These are they that shall have judgment without mercy; these are they upon whom the wrath of God shall come to the uttermost; these are the serpents, the generation of vipers, who, dying in that state, cannot escape the damnation of hell. But let us look at the people of God. How are they represented? They are represented, first, in God's choice. He holds them in his choice; he has chosen them, and he holds them simply as objects of his choice: "You are a chosen generation." And thus, election is of grace. It is a good thing that election is of grace in the motive of it; that is a good thing. We cannot conceive any other motive on the Lord's part by which he could have chosen us. Second, it is a better thing still that election is of grace in the act of it; that is a better thing still. And better than all, and beyond it all, is that election is of grace in the design of it. He has never acted contrary to his choice, no; and so, they stand before him as a chosen generation, their names written in the book of life. And if your name be written in the book of life, you will be brought to receive the testimony of the same, to understand the testimony of the same, and to appear before God as the same, for him that he has chosen he will cause to draw near to him. Second, they are represented in oneness with the priesthood of Christ, a royal priesthood. There is our perfect freedom from sin, from blemish, from fault of any kind. Third, they are represented in consecration by Jesus Christ, a holy nation, free from sin by him. Fourth, they are represented as a peculiar people. The word *peculiar* there signifies *singular*; substitute the word *singular*, that they are a singular people; that is, that they shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations; they shall dwell where no other people ever did, ever can, or ever shall. They dwell in God's love, and they dwell there alone; no other people dwell there. They dwell in God's choice, they dwell in God's Christ, they dwell in God's Spirit, and shall ultimately dwell in God's presence, in a way that no other people shall. Ah, see the difference between the two people then; the one have nothing in which to appear before God but either their profanity or their false religion, or both; whereas the man that thus receives Christ Jesus the Lord, he appears before God in God's choice, in oneness with the priesthood of Christ, in that consecration taught us by the delightful truth that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; and that by that separation or distinction, a peculiar people, singular people, that they should show forth the praises of him, and that is a very singular thing, a very singular thing. You cannot in our day, it is an awful truth, go where you may you will find it out, you can hardly commit a greater crime in the estimate of the professing world than to show forth the praise of the Lord and to praise the Lord alone. Ah, they say, you not only believe in election, but praise God for election; shocking, say they, shocking to the last degree. Well, they say, you not only believe that you are holy as you stand in Christ, and that none of the sins of which you are the subject can defile you as you stand in him, but you praise God for it; why, say they, shocking. You believe that you are a singular people, and that no others can be saved but those that the Lord saves, independent of the creature; shocking, say they. And you cannot commit a greater crime in the eyes of the professing world than to show forth these praises of him that has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Thus, then, see the contrast between the different measurements; and see the contrast between the presentations. Oh, what a sweet thought when you come to die, to lay your head on the pillow, and say, Well, I have fought a good fight, I have held fast the truth; I have had some struggles for it, but I have held it fast; I have finished my course, I am got to the end now; I have kept the faith; and now there is a crown laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing!

But I hasten now just to notice this woman; just a word upon that, and that I suppose must bring me to the conclusion. Now, this woman, seated in the midst of the ephah, this woman, you are aware, I need not bring any scriptures to prove it, that the false church is spoken of as a woman, and she is intended by Satan to be imposed upon the world as the true church. And it is a remarkable thing, the farther a church is from the truth, the more confident they are that they are the church. Who is more confident than the Mahometan church, or more confident than the Roman Catholic church, or more confident than the Greek church? all three of which, perhaps, of any great bodies of people, are farther from the truth than any others; because the Wesleyans and duty-faith people certainly are not so far off, in the letter at least, from the truth, as those churches are. The farther they are from the truth, the more confident they are that they are the church. So, it has ever been the object of Satan to impose upon the world a false church, and to impose upon the church, if possible, a false church. Now this woman sits; that is her throne; this false religion is her throne. His Grace of Canterbury sits upon a parliamentary religion; that is his throne. The Pope of Rome sits upon a superstitious religion; that is his throne. And so all that belong to these religions, Church of Englandism, I speak not against the people, but the system itself; Church of Englandism is nothing else but a piece of Popery, rubbed up, and brushed up, and scrubbed up, and polished a little; it is the same in essence, just the same in essence as Popery, nothing else. So that all systems that men devise, they all belong to delusion, and they are the thrones of exaltation, and pretty lofty thrones they are. For, could they but once persuade us that the Puseyite really can by a few drops of water regenerate the child, and that they really can come to our sick-rooms and forgive us our sins, that they really can do so, why, who among us would not willingly give them every halfpenny they had? Why, we would then kiss their great toes, and their little ones too; we would do anything to accommodate such kind-hearted creatures. I am sure, as the woman kissed the Savior's feet, and washed them with her tears, I am sure I would not mind kissing their feet, if they could regenerate the souls of my children and forgive my sins. Is it any wonder that people that do believe such things hold them in such reverence?

Here, then, is this woman enthroned on this delusion; a very different position from that of the true church. The true church of the blessed God, whether her ministers or her members, they do not exalt themselves. True ministers of God humble themselves, and come before the people as fellow-sinners before fellow-sinners, as fellow-mortals before fellow-mortals, as fellow-believers before fellow-believers, with no pretension whatever of a fleshly kind; yea, so far from that, he feels that he is not sufficient even to think a good thought in and of himself, but that his sufficiency is of the Lord; he lays open his conscience, and heart, and testimony to the people, and leaves them to judge. The true minister never imposes anything authoritatively upon the people; as said the apostle Paul, "We have no dominion over your faith, but are helpers together of your joy." So, then, see the enthronement of the false church. But if we come to the enthronement of the true church, how different! I had intended to have said a few words upon this, but time forbids. I may just notice one scripture. "raised us up," said the apostle, "and made us sit together," not in places of human device, "in heavenly places," of divine appointment, of divine constitution, of divine arrangement, divine provision; "made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Thus he raises up the poor out of the dust, but he takes care first to bring them into the dust; he raises up the beggar from the dunghill, but he takes care first to turn the sinner into a beggar, and make him feel that his own sins are the dunghill of eternal infamy, to which he must be subjected but for the grace of God. Those that are thus brought down, these are they that he raises up out of the dust, and lifts them up

from the dunghill of sin, and death, and delusion, and sets them with princes, princes of his people, making them inherit the throne of glory.

Oh, the mighty difference, then, between exaltation by human invention, and being raised up into sweet oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ! I should like to have had half an hour more; but your time is gone, and I will say no more.