

DIVINE ENGRAVING

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, November 13th, 1864

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, Borough Road

Volume 6 Number 310

Behold, I have gravened you upon the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." Isaiah 49:16

"Behold" take a note of it, mark it well, "I have gravened you upon the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before, me."

First, I will give a general explanation of what is meant by the engraving. Secondly, what is meant in our text particularly. Thirdly and lastly, the great love of God to come into such a position as that in which he is here represented.

Now first, then, just a word upon *engraving*, that is, upon what is meant in the word of God. I think, as a general rule, though we shall have to notice an exception, that an engraving denotes permanence, denotes that which is never to be abolished. I think this is the truth represented by the engraving, which we shall see from the instances which I shall give before I come to the meaning in particular in our text. And there is something very pleasing in the thought that there is an infallible certainty in the truth of God. Why, if that which most concerns us be certain; if that which is to last to eternity be certain; if the mercy, and the goodness, and the promise of God be certain, we may well bear with the uncertainties of other things, seeing there is one kingdom that cannot be moved; all other kingdoms may be moved, but there is one kingdom that cannot be moved. The earth may indeed be moved, and carried into the midst of the sea, but there is one city that has foundations; there is one gospel that will never run dry; there is one gospel whose streams will never cease to be the consolation of those that are lovers of the truth as it is in Jesus. Now I said permanence is, I think, the reigning idea. Hence you observe that the law of the commandments was engraved upon tables of stone, perhaps to present the idea of permanence. We seem never weary of repeating these two great truths, namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ has met and honored, and forever established, the precepts of God's holy law; this he has done by his obedient life; nothing can be taken, from it, nor anything added to it. Jesus began at the beginning, and he went on to the end. And if the law be eternally permanent, his righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thus the law in its precept is eternally established for you that believe, for it is unto all and upon all them that believe. And then the other great truth, denoting the permanence of the law, or, at least, wherein we see also the permanence of the law, is the death of Jesus Christ.

He has suffered the penalty of the law, he has suffered the curse of the law, so that where he is, there is no more death; where he is, there is no more curse; where he is, there is no more wrath; and thus the law in its majesty is eternally established; it is done, and done for ever. Thus, then, the engraving on the tables of stone conveys the idea of permanence, and we rejoice that in the Savior's work there is that eternity of duration by which the law still remains in its permanence, and at the same time on the side of those that belong to the Lord; for the law is not unjust, for it would be as unjust to find anything against God's elect as it would be unjust to take a sinner to heaven without the precept being met and the penalty endured. But when the old covenant was engraved, there seems an exception to this idea of permanence. Here is the 27th of Deuteronomy. God commanded a summary of the old covenant, or that law, to be engraved; but then it was done in a way that does not seem to denote permanence. They were to plaster the stones on Mount Ebal, and to write a summary of, the law on these stones. Now this plaster was not likely to last very long, so that there the writing or engraving is an exception to the idea of permanence, and seems to denote something transitory, something temporary. And if that be so, if I am right in my idea, how very strikingly that answers both to the pleasures and to the penalties of that covenant! The pleasures of that covenant were, that if the people walked with God, their land was to yield plenty, they were to eat in plenty, and there was to be neither famine nor war, they were to have every temporal advantage; and the penalties were, that if they apostatized, which they did, in that case they were to be subjected to temporal penalties. So that both the advantages and the disadvantages of that covenant would pass away, and so they were written on plaster, I think, to denote the temporality of that covenant. Hence the apostle Paul says of that covenant, that it waxed old and vanished away. And ministers little think how much they show their unfitness for their position when they jumble up the new and the old covenant together, and when they take up old covenant language, such as "Why will you die?" and apply it to sinners already dead, and ask them why they will die, when in fact they are already spiritually dead. Little do those ministers think that thereby they demonstrate their ignorance to those that know better. Such a minister is to every Christian as one that is not made rightly to divide the word of truth; the apostle calls such, vain janglers of the law, not knowing what they say, nor understanding whereof they affirm. But we come to the gospel. Now, while we have the idea of permanence in the engraving of the law, the idea of that which is temporal in the kind of engraving of the old covenant, that was all to pass away, both its pleasures and its pains, its advantages and its curses, these were all of a temporal kind, though of course they had a typical meaning. Now when we come to the gospel, we shall again have permanence brought before us. Hence, in Zechariah, where Jesus Christ is called a foundation, "Upon one stone shall be seven eyes; I will engrave the graving thereof, says the Lord." And the graving that stone underwent, by which it acquired the seven eyes, represents the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he underwent that suffering by which he acquired a perfect knowledge of sin. He knew what sin was in a way that none other ever knew, because he suffered the full bitterness of sin; he knew what the curse of the law was, because he suffered that curse in a way that none other ever did; he knew what the wrath of God was, for he endured that in a way that no other ever did. Now Jesus Christ remains, then, this perfect foundation, this everlasting foundation, this sure foundation. And the next words in the same part explain what is there meant, namely, that "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." So that that which, the Savior underwent was that by which iniquity was put away. Here, then, is the firm foundation laid in Zion, and he who is brought to see and know that iniquity can be put away in no other way, and that believes in him, shall not be confounded. I will give, before I enter upon our text, one more instance of this graving, to denote the permanence of the gospel. Here is the permanence of

the foundation, the certainty of the foundation that God has laid in Zion. Job has a fourfold request bearing upon this, and he gives us, in connection with that fourfold request, an epitome of the gospel. Let us quote his words. He said, "Oh that my words were now written", they are written; "that they were printed in a book" they are printed in the best of books, in the most wonderful book that ever did or ever can exist, the holy Bible "that they were graven with an iron pen" and they are as firm as though they were, or firmer, "and lead in the rock forever." Why, surely, they must be words of great importance for him to make such requests as these. Let us hear his words, for his words are an epitome of the gospel, including in that epitome the mediation of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and eternal glory. Let us just concisely analyze his words. "For I know that my Redeemer lives." Observe, he places the Savior in the current tense, he "lives." Just compare this with the words of the apostle, where he says of Christ that he "abides," the current tense again, "a priest continually." Let me tell you that if there could have been a chasm, however small, if there could have been a breach, however contracted, in which he was not the Redeemer, in which he did not abide a priest, the arrows of the Almighty and the thunderbolts of heaven through that breach must find you out, banish you from the presence of God for ever, unless you could pass by that breach with no sin in you; and that would be impossible, for there is never a moment when we have not sin enough in us to damn our souls to the lowest hell. Now, then, Jesus Christ abides a priest continually. And as one of our hymns beautifully says, and the words are very sweet, but you cannot know the sweetness of them; unless you know something of the bitterness of one side, you cannot appreciate the other, namely, concerning the people of God, that:

"Sin and guilt infest them here;
In Christ they all complete appear."

" I know that my Redeemer *lives* he is always my Redeemer, he is always my interposer, he is always my advocate, he is always my intercessor, he is always my hiding-place, he is always my way in which the blessed God approves and accepts me. "I know that my Redeemer and the word "Redeemer" there has two opposite meanings, the one is that explained by the apostle, that "He has, obtained eternal redemption;" the other is, for the Hebrew word there translated "Redeemer " means "an avenger." "Shall not God avenge his own elect?" So that Jesus remains for them as their representative continually; even when he died he did not die as a priest, he died as a sacrifice; but while he was the dying sacrifice he was at the same time the living priest, because he was God as well as man. "Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." "I know that my Redeemer lives." Here, then, is a firm foundation, and here is a permanent redemption, here is a continual priest. "And that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." So, he did: that latter day is gone by. Our Latter Day Saints are 1,800 years too late; they may well be called latter day, for they are latter day with a vengeance; 1,800 years behind time. "He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth;" that is, at the end of the time that God appointed should elapse before he came; at the end of the Jewish dispensation, at the end of Jewish time, he came, and put an end to that time, established Christian time; that Christian time shall roll on forever. Job says, "He shall *stand* upon the earth he shall not stumble, he shall not be thrown down, he shall not be turned aside, he shall stand; heavy as shall be the mighty load placed upon him, he shall stand fast; innumerable as shall be the snares that shall be laid for his feet, not one shall ensnare him; and though they sought and employed all their learning and power, ecclesiastical, military, all the power they could call into requisition, to catch something out of his mouth by which they could throw him down, but no, no, he never stumbled; no man could take his life from him. "He shall stand upon the earth." Job knew

he should stand to all he was engaged to stand to; he knew he should stand and defy the adversary; he knew he should stand fast till he had thrown down the towers of hell, till he had led captivity captive, till he had bruised the serpent's head, till he had united the perfections of God, till he had magnified the law, gained the victory, swallowed up death in victory, brought life, and immortality to light. Here is a permanence, then, certainly. "And," Job says, "though after my skin worms destroy this body," my poor skin, that's gone by disease, and by-and-bye the worms will have my body, "yet in my flesh shall I see God." Some have thought that refers to the incarnation of Christ, "In my flesh shall I see God." No, no, that is not the meaning, you will make Job repetitional if you do. "My Redeemer lives." There is a Divine Person, called by John the Word, the Word which was in the beginning.

"Ere the blue heavens were stretched abroad,
From everlasting was the Word,"

Job's Redeemer, "he shall stand upon the earth." There is his incarnation, there is his manhood, there is his sonship, there is his mediatorial work. So that when Job says, "In my flesh shall I see God," Job means that he should rise from the dead at the last great day. The Old Testament saints were as well established in the ultimate resurrection of the body as we are, and better too, some of them. Why, Moses at the bush saw the resurrection, as Christ explained. So, "in my flesh shall I see God." I shall rise with flesh incorruptible, flesh immortal, flesh that shall be mighty, new made, new formed altogether, not a new creation, for then it would not be the same, but a resurrection, the same person raised up like unto his glorious body; "whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes, and not another." See, then, Job embodies first, the person of Christ in his eternal sameness; "My Redeemer lives." Secondly, the humiliation of Christ, and his success in that humiliation, "he shall stand upon the earth," come to earth to bleed and die; then the ultimate consequence; I shall rise from the dead, my flesh shall rise at the last great trumpet sound. "I shall behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with your likeness." Thus, then, we get a permanent law, that has been met by the eternity of the Savior's work. We get a broken covenant, that is gone; we get a gospel foundation, that remains; we get a gospel that is firm, that also remains.

I will now come to our text. The engraving here will mean, first, identification. I do not say that it would imply this in the custom here alluded to, which I may perhaps have a word upon presently. The Lord, in engraving his people upon his hands, conveys the idea of identification, that he identifies himself with them, that he makes himself one with them, in a way that makes all the similes that we use very poor. We speak of Christ as the head, and of his people as the members; this is very close, but even this is but a poor illustration of that identification with which the great God has identified himself with his people; that, I think, then, is one of the truths here intended. Let us look at it. First, a Divine Person, that took real human nature, not the sin of human nature, sin is not an essential part of human nature; sin in one sense is an exotic, but unhappily has become naturalized, and therefore is natural to us. But Jesus Christ took perfect human nature, free, entirely free from sin, and thus divine nature and human nature became one Person, the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star, Emmanuel, God with us, he is but one Person. Now God the Father is one with Christ in his divinity; there are not three Divinities, there is only one Deity, though that Deity subsists in three Persons, three distinct Persons, though not separate. Here, then, this Divine Person has become one of us; flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, identified with us.

And I have, in a measure anticipated what might be said upon this part, as to his identifying himself with us; that while he took our nature, and there was no sin in his human nature, nor was it possible for him to sin, not even as man, because he was God as well as man; and he was but one Person; but when I look a little farther into this identification, that he so identified himself with us, this wonderful Person did, that he is called the surety of the better covenant. And whosoever looks into that perfect law of liberty will see that Jesus Christ did hereby become responsible for our sins, that he became responsible for our persons, that he became responsible for the honors of the law, and for all purposes of that covenant; so that the Christian has not one particle of legal responsibility upon him. The Christian is under gospel responsibility, and I am responsible to God for the profession I make of his name; but I am not under a particle of legal responsibility. Jesus Christ is the surety; he did, really and truly, take my place. If I were under the law, he came under the law; if I were in sin, he came under that sin, to put away that sin; and if I were under condemnation, he came under that condemnation, to put an end to that condemnation; and if I were under death and darkness, he came under that death and darkness, and destroyed the same. Here is identification, then; here is God with all his heart; there is not a perfection of his nature that does not infinitely sympathize with us; there is not a thought of his heart that is not precious toward us. He has not one evil thought; "How precious, O God, are your thoughts! if I would reckon them up, they are more than can be numbered." "I know the thoughts I think toward you: thoughts of peace, and not of evil." And this includes, of course, identification in the other way; namely, that we are identified with him; one with Jesus Christ. Whatever Jesus Christ is, that we are reckoned to be, in this oneness with him; and the blessed God no more thinks of being angry with you than he does of being angry with him; he no more thinks of laying a fault to your charge than he does to the charge of his dear Son; he no more thinks of condemning you than he does of condemning him. And I do not wonder at some Christians not having much peace, I was going to say; for they live in those legal regions, and they set up so much of their own supposed goodness in one shape or the other, that they seem to make, by a misguided judgment, so little use of the Lord Jesus Christ, that sometimes one is tempted to think that there almost might as well be no Jesus Christ for the little use we make of him. I will charge myself with the same, that if I look to self it is like Peter, looking down to the waves, and observing the winds, he began to sink; so, you and I. But when we can remember that we are identified with him, reckoned one with him, that what he is we are reckoned to be, can anything be more encouraging than this, for us to look to the Lord? As says the apostle, "We have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter into the holy of holies." This is one thing, I think, then, meant. The second thing is indissolubility. It is represented as an engraving upon the person, as marks that the Lord will, carry forever. Some have thought here is an allusion to the pierced hands of the Savior; perhaps there may be I will not say there is not; but I simply take our text as a figurative. form of speech. Here, then, are the people engraved on Jehovah's hands, on his person, so, that it is indelible; here it is, then, indissoluble; there is no such thing as alteration or separation. They are marks, as Toplady says, of indelible grace. And when the Lord engraved their names, he engraved their names from everlasting, and yet it is as fresh to him now as though he did it yesterday. Why, I have a mark in my hand now that I caused accidentally just fifty years ago; I cut my hand accidentally, dreadfully, and I have got the mark now as clear as possible. That is just fifty years ago, and I can recollect the knife, I can recollect the field, I can recollect the spot; and if I were in Hampshire now, I could go to the very field I cut my hand in fifty years ago. I was a little boy then, and it seems but yesterday. And I have got the mark, and nobody but myself understands that mark. I can understand it; I know how it came there, and that it is there, and that it will be there as long as I live. Now, then, the blessed God has engraved his

people on his hands, and there is the fresh mark, and none but himself understands it; his people do when he reveals it; and there it will remain, he will never forget it; it remains there forever; just as long as the blessed God lives, so long will the engraving remain; and as he is "the ever living God, were all the nations dead," and is from everlasting to everlasting, this engraving shall remain. "I have graven you upon the palms of my hands;" indissoluble. So then, identification; and the soul once united to God by Christ Jesus, there is no separation can take place. The third thing meant is perpetual remembrance. "O Israel, you shall not be forgotten of me." I have evidence upon evidence in my own soul of the Lord's thoughtfulness of his people. If I am cast down, I always find there is a limit to it, both as to the extent, and as to the time of it; and when I have been cast down so much and so long, presently, without any alteration, perhaps, in the external circumstances that have cast me down, some part of God's blessed word will steal upon my mind, come into my heart, strengthen my faith, make me happy, and I call myself a thousand fools for my uneasiness; I can smile then at everything, and say, "I have nothing to fear, I have nothing to fear; the Lord is my light, the Lord is the strength of my life, the Lord is my salvation; whom shall I fear, and of whom shall I be afraid?" "When my enemies came to eat up my flesh," said David, "they stumbled and fell. Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear." But that is when we can recognize this oneness with the Lord, that he holds us in perpetual remembrance. Many a time when people have been cursing me the Lord has been blessing me; many times, when Satan has set certain persons as his agents to annoy me, the Lord has been calming me, pouring in oil and wine. As John Bunyan very nicely represents it, there is the devil pouring water upon the fire of God's love in the heart to put it out; but, as John Bunyan says, Satan does not see the man that is behind the wall pouring in the oil. So, while one pours in water, the other pours in the oil, and the oil and the water will not mix, and so the oil makes the fire burn in spite of it all. And just so it is when Satan comes in like a flood, the Lord is pleased to pour in the oil; ah, it keeps the soul happy; your affections rise, and you rejoice notwithstanding all. So that Satan's very attempts to injure us, and make us leave off believing, and praying, and fearing God, all this only calls for more oil, and "as your days, so shall your strength be." Bless the Lord, then, that he gives us these proofs that he watches over us and remembers us; and that ten thousand of our doubts, and fears, and anxieties are really in one sense needless; and yet, if we had not these exercises, we should not so highly appreciate his wonderful mercy. Still I must say his remembrance of us is very wonderful. I could tell you several things in relation to my position as a minister; and I will just give you one instance, time does not allow me to say more. Now the Bible is sometimes shut up; heaven seems as brass over my head, and the earth as iron under my feet; so that when I go into the pulpit, I feel as though I had not a word to say, except to tell the people I have nothing to say; and something says in my mind, What is the good of your going into the pulpit? You have nothing to say; you know you have not. Well, some scripture will come like electricity into the soul, strike my attention, light up my affections, expand my mind, and that scripture will point to another, and to another, and to another, and to another, and in about five minutes I get a good sermon; and when it comes in that way it generally abides with me; and I can then, for me, you know, for me, preach very well when that is the case, even better than when I am sometimes longer manufacturing, I was going to say, and putting things together. Nevertheless, I am not going to speak lightly of reading or studying the word of God; I believe the diligent soul shall be made fat; but still, I am sometimes so driven, and the Lord sees I am, and not for my sake, but for your sakes; he gives me a word. I know Lord Bacon says, "Reading makes the full man, conversation the ready man, writing the correct man;" and I know reading does make the full man. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Here, then, is the Lord's kind remembrance of us.

We see his hand in providence, we see his hand in grace, and we often have to say, "What is man, that you are mindful of him?" "I have graven you upon the palms of my hands;" not "upon the palm of my hand," but upon both hands; as though it was not enough to have us in one hand, but both hands. I would not be fanciful here, but as though the Lord would teach us like this: Now then, I have graven you on both my hands. Take one hand to be the hand of providence and take the other hand to be the hand of grace. And so, I will always remember you in your temporal necessities; I will always remember you in your spiritual necessities. So that he remembers us both ways. I know some people are so spiritually minded that they do not care about the things of this life. Well, I cannot say that I am of the like mind entirely; I can say that which I eat and drink, and apparel, are very humble matters with me, very humble matters indeed, and very secondary objects; still, at the same time, people sharing in the common responsibilities of this life do feel that the things of this life are with them important, that they do weigh upon their minds, and they are sometimes a very great trial to them. And, therefore, it is not at all wrong to look to the Lord to appear for us in providence, as well as in grace, but it is right to do so; and where it gives a heart to look to him, he will appear, he will appear. "Commit your way unto the Lord;" never be ashamed to own him in his providence. It is his sun that shines upon you; the clouds are his that send the genial shower; the seasons are his that give us seedtime and harvest. Let us, therefore, recognize, as far as he shall enable us, the hand of Providence appearing for us. "I have graven you upon the palms of my hands;" and the hand of grace. Again, graven us upon the palms of his hands also means that he will not do anything without remembering us. He looks at the hand of providence; Now I am going to exalt this Nebuchadnezzar; but in so doing I must remember my people. So, he did, and took care that the exaltation of Nebuchadnezzar should be, up to a certain point, a protection to his people. So that, whenever he moves in providence, he always does it in remembrance of his people; never moves in providence to throw down or to build up, or in any way, without remembering his people; because the great end God has in view in his mode of governing the world is the welfare of his people. His people are the salt of the earth, they are the pillars of the world, they are the persons whose welfare must be first considered, and the others afterwards; God's firstborn; they stand first; he has made them A 1, and A 1 they will ever remain. So that he will never do anything without remembering his people, never. He will not bring the flood upon the earth, and say, I forgot that Noah was not in the ark; if I had remembered that, I would have brought him in. He will not burn the cities of the plain, and say, I forgot Lot was there; if I had remembered that, I would have brought him out. He will not bring the sea in upon the Egyptians, and say, Uh, I thought the Israelites were safe, or else I would not have brought the sea in. He will not throw all the walls of Jericho down; there shall be an exception; just where Rahab's house is, there is faith in God, faith in Christ; and he will not throw all the walls down, and say, I forgot Rahab; I would not have thrown that part down if I had known it. But no; he remembered her. Oh, my hearer, however obscure, in a cellar, in a garret, in a cave or den of the earth, or however obscure you are, if you are a child of God, then God is with you, observing your sighs, and groans, and exercises, and circumstances; taking a whole survey; and he will deal with you as is best for you, for the greatest advancement of his own glory, and thine eternal welfare.

Now I have not done justice to my text this morning; I can see a great many things in it that I have not brought out of it, and that time does not allow me even to refer to now. I must, therefore, close with a few remarks upon the last part; "Your walls are continually before me." Now, I think the Lord's appearing for Hezekiah is an explanation of this. There are the walls of Jerusalem, and unless the Lord protect those walls the citizens are not safe. When Nebuchadnezzar came, the Lord

did not protect the walls; they therefore threw them down and scattered the people. When the Romans came, the Lord did not protect the walls, therefore they threw them down, scattered the people, and they remain scattered to this day. But in Hezekiah's time, as he was a believer, then the Lord did protect the walls, and the consequence was that the people were safe. Now the literal walls of Jerusalem were not always before him, because the people turned their backs upon God's truth, and he went away from them, and said, "Woe unto them when I depart from them." But the walls of these spiritual citizens are the walls of salvation, Christ's salvation, and the walls of Christ's salvation are ever before God; they are unscalable, they cannot be thrown down, these jasper walls are altogether impregnable. And the people inside of these walls, their song is, while the watchmen stand on the walls to direct inquirers, saying to those inquirers, "Go round about Zion; mark you well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, tell the towers thereof, that you may declare it to the generation following;" then the song of the citizens is, encircled with these eternal walls, and that God, as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, is round about them, "This God is our God for ever and forever; he will be our guide, even unto death."

Time does not allow me to touch upon the last part, namely, the great love of God in coming into such a position as this towards us and bringing us into such a position. I could mention many circumstances in life which it requires great love to enter upon, if you consider the responsibilities you enter into. And I am sure the love of our God must have been love infinite and eternal to have entered into such an identification as this with us, and to bring us thus so acquainted with him. Here are endearments infinite, here are endearments supernal, endearments eternal.