

THE MASTERY GAINED

A SERMON

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“He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.” Isaiah 12:3

OUR text literally refers to Cyrus, and to those victories with which the Lord favored Cyrus, especially in delivering the people of God from Babylon, and also by his decree building the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem and establishing the people in the promised land. In this he is a type of the Savior in his obtaining the final victory and establishing his people in that heavenly kingdom of which the Promised Land was a figure. We shall have to take the preceding verse to show that our text belongs spiritually and especially to the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor would there seem so much meaning in this text if understood in the mere abstract sense; but when we remember that our sins are our destructive enemies, and that Christ pursued our sins, that he overtook them, that he conquered them, and that they are taken eternally away, and that he passed safely, and it was a path, too, that he had not before gone with his feet, when we look at our text in this light, then we feel that there is something in it that essentially and everlastingly concerns us.

Before I enter upon the subject, I ought, perhaps, just to acknowledge that I feel very much indebted to our kind brethren who supplied my place here last Lord's day, when I was unable to be here, to Mr. John Fothergill, for his kindness in preaching for us, to Mr. Isaac Comfort, and to Mr. Thomas Stringer. I make this public acknowledgment of the kindness of the brethren.

I will now at once proceed to notice what is fairly implied in our text. First, *the mastery here gained*, “He pursued them.” Secondly, *the safety maintained*, “and passed safely.” Thirdly and lastly, *the strangeness of the road*, “even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.”

First, then, I notice *the mastery here gained*, “he pursued them.” Now the preceding verse says, “Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as dust to his sword and as driven stubble to his bow.” Let us now look at all this as relating to us. First, “Who raised up the righteous man from the east” This righteous man, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, how sweet the thought, I seem lately to think more and more about it, that there is a righteousness that Jesus Christ brings in that was complete and is complete; that it was everlasting, that it is everlasting; there it stands,

the complete justification of him that believes. We are aware, of course, friends, and delighted with the thought that Jesus Christ was abstractedly righteous as well as relatively righteous, or as well as living a righteous life for us. But the more we know of our own hearts the more we shall prize that spirit in which the Psalmist was when he said, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only." "As," said the apostle, "by the disobedience of one many became sinners, so by the obedience of one many shall become righteous." We may well in these matters pray, "Lord, increase our faith!" for here God is just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; and so entirely so, and so finally so, that the great challenge stands, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Christ, then, is set forth as being righteous that we, by believing in him, might be righteous also. Ah, that scripture may strike terror, and must strike terror, when read with an enlightened conscience, right through the soul apart from Jesus Christ, namely, that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The man conscious of what he is, knowing that all his righteousness's are as filthy rags, says, "That cuts me off forever." But then, when it is declared unto you, "Men and brethren," that "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things," notice that, "from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses;" what delight unutterable does this create in the mind of the convinced sinner. Thus, then, he pursued our sins and sorrows till he thus brought in for us everlasting righteousness. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God." And a right knowledge of this unites us to the Lord; it makes us love the Lord, as the woman did that washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, anointing them with costly ointment. Now it is said of this righteous man, that he was "raised up." That means, that he grew "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." We must, of course, understand this as it refers to God in the relative sense. We are not to understand that the Lord increasingly loved Jesus Christ, nor to understand that the Lord was increasingly in love with him, because his love to him was always the same; but it does say that "he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." So that we must understand that growing in favor in relation to God in the manifestation thereof; he grew in favor in the manifestation thereof. We see that he stood in favor with God at his birth, we see that by what took place; we see that he stood in favor with God, when he was twelve years old, by what took place in his conversation with the doctors and the rulers, who were astonished at his understanding and answers. Now he lives in private life for many years; perhaps to take that part of the curse, "By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread;" perhaps, I say, to take that part of the curse. Now, when he comes into public life, will he meet with favor? Is he still rising, as it were expresses it? His place was under the law; but will he do so well as to work himself righteously from under the law? He taking our place was under our sin, but will he do so well as to work himself out from under our sin by putting an end to our sin; will he do this? Yes; Zechariah saw he would do this, and thus he was raised up. So, when he was baptized, we see this, where God the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." We see a year or two after, on Mount Tabor, another such manifestation, and we see a few days before his death another such manifestation; and we see in his death, in his resurrection, and in his ascension to the right hand of God, we see this truth. Thus, while he grew in wisdom and stature, he grew in favor in the manifestation thereof, with God and man. Now, then let us apply this, or pray the Lord to apply it to our souls. Was Jesus Christ righteous? It was that we, poor, ungodly creatures may, by believing in him, be righteous by his righteousness, and being righteous by his righteousness, hereby pronounced righteous even as he is righteous. Was Jesus Christ raised up, and was there a progressive manifestation of Divine favor, favor upon favor, until he is enthroned in glory, comforted on every side, in a fullness of

joy, and pleasures forever more? Why did he rise thus? That we might rise, and that there may be unto us by him a progressive manifestation of God's favor, grace, mercy, good will, salvation, and glory, until that prayer of this wonderful Person is answered, "Father, I will that those whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Thus then he pursued that that stood against us, brought in this righteousness; and I say it with reverence, we are obliged sometimes to speak after the manner of men in order to convey some of our thoughts, feelings, and ideas, say it with reverence, if the dear Savior had not succeeded by his own personal worth and work in obtaining the increased manifestation of Divine favor unto him, then he never could have been unto us the way by which we are raised up as from the dust and from the dung-hill, and made ultimately to inherit the throne of glory. Here, then, who raised up this righteous man? Ah, the sinner falls down, down, down. Why, even the Christian is a worse man every day he lives. You that have known the Lord for twenty, or thirty, or more years than that, you are a worse man now than you were when you first knew the Lord, because you have had your faults since that, and not only so, but the workings of your fallen nature have caused you, as it were, to fall inwardly seven times a day; so that you are a greater sinner, and as regards your real condition as a sinner considered, you are in a lower state now than you were when you first knew the Lord. So that downward, downward, downward, is the only path a sinner as a sinner considered can go, until he goes down into hell. But then, on the other hand, you are a better man now than you were years ago, because there is more of Christ about you, more of the spirit of the gospel about you, and more of the life of the gospel about you, and more of the God of the gospel about you, and more of the truth of the gospel about you. Therefore, you read of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus, then, by his pursuing our sins till they were destroyed, he has hereby brought in righteousness: he has hereby acquired an increased manifestation unto him of Divine favor, until he arrived at where he now is. Just so by him we have an increased manifestation of Divine favor. And I think it is right that the Christian should look at this. Do not, if you can help it, run away with the gloomy thought that the Lord will not be so good to you in the future as he has been in times past. Why I will venture the honor, I was going to say, of my prophetic office and standing upon the ground that he will be better to you than at the beginning; for "though your beginnings were small, your latter end shall greatly increase." And when old age and infirmities abound, he is represented then as carrying us, when we cannot walk, "Even to hoar hairs will I carry you, and will deliver you." And, said one, "Now I am old, and grey headed, O God forsake me not;" nor did he, nor will he; but he will be unto us better and better, from strength to strength; one ray of light after another, until the last cloud, that of death, is shone away by the presence of that blessed God who is unto us as a sun that will never go down. So, then, some of you, if you have not much hope on earth, Well, you say, I shall plod along, I suppose, such as I am, and I do not suppose I shall increase my comforts much. Never mind, you have got plenty in the Lord. He will be good to you. He has not revealed one millionth part of his love to you yet; he has not revealed one millionth part of his glory to you yet; much as you may have been favored, he will yet favor you more, "for eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." But, says one, if you knew what a poor, hard-hearted, rebellious, miserable creature I am in and of myself, you would not talk like that. Then I could show you how it is those that know that they are poor and wretched and blind and miserable, that are glad to have mercy in God's own way; and those that do not know this, they are determined to have God's favor in a way he is determined they never should, namely, on the ground of some worth, or worthiness, or doing, in the creature. Therefore, if you thus know your own wretchedness, then you may say with the apostle, "We are the true circumcision that

worship God in spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Why you, in the sight of God, would say, confidence in the flesh! Blessed God, I might as well have confidence in the devil. I might as well have confidence in sin itself; might as well have confidence in hell itself; for “in the flesh dwells no good thing.” Then, if you are thus detached from self, Christ will be the dearer to your heart. Thus, then, he brought that righteousness and gradual increased manifestation of the Lord's favor. And so, if such be your way, the Lord will deal with you in like manner. The more we know of the emptiness of the world the less we shall think of that, and the more we know of Jesus Christ the more we shall cleave to him, be wrapped up in him, and acknowledge there is no life, hope, glory, and blessedness like that which is described by the apostle to be filled with all joy and peace in believing. Now, he pursued this, carried out his work, and has hereby brought in righteousness, and has revealed the mystic ladder takes us step by step up into the fullness of everlasting glory.

But it says, “Called him to his foot;” called Christ to his foot. That in Scripture phrase you are aware, friends, is the place of the learner, and it denotes entire submission. So, Jesus Christ as man was a learner; he learnt obedience by the things that he suffered. He grew in wisdom. And upon this subject of the dear Savior sitting, as it were, at the feet of his heavenly Father, he said to the disciples, “Henceforth I call you not servants” or slaves, it means, “for the servant knows not what his lord does” does not enter into any fellowship or counsels of his lord, “but I have called you friends; for all things that I have learnt of my Father I have made known unto you.” And the dear Savior again says, “I have given them the word which you gave me.” Yes, there is a promise in Isaiah to this very point, where the Father said to the Son. “This my covenant with them, says the Lord, My Spirit that is upon you, and my word which I have put in your mouth” there it is, you see “will not depart out of your mouth” nor did they; Jesus Christ still lives in all the doctrines of the everlasting covenant “nor out of the mouth of your seed” perhaps there meaning the apostles; nor did they “nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed” that is their spiritual offspring; nor shall they. “Called him to his foot.” If the Lord Jesus Christ had not thus submitted to God, we never could have had the honor of sitting at his feet; we never could have had the honor of sitting there, listening to and receiving the gracious words that proceed from his mouth. Ah, when are we happy? When, as little children, we can, as it were sit at the Savior's feet, and thus receive his blessed words. Then notice the next step, “Gave the nations before him.” Hear what the Savior said upon this, “You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him.” You at once perceive, friends, that it is essential that Christ should have this universal dominion, because his people are among all other people. Hence, they are spoken of as “out of all nations, kindred's, and tongues, and people.” There were you in a state of nature, and sin said, And, here you shall stop; and Satan said, And, here you shall stop; and you said, no here I will stay; I am not going to be disturbed, I will remain just where I am. And your friends said, you must remain just where you are; you mustn't become one of these moping religionists. Religion's well when you can't enjoy the world any longer, but you must remain where you are. And so, the strong man, Satan or sin, whichever you please, keeps the soul, and the goods are in peace. But by-and-bye the dear Savior, in the way I shall presently have minutely to describe, comes rushing in, lays hold of that soul just as a Shepard takes a sheep from the wild beast, lays it on his shoulder, and goes away rejoicing taking that sheep to the fold, and making it in his own time free. This is just the way the Lord dealt with us. I really do not know that I am more astonished at the conversion of Saul of Tarsus than I am at my own conversion, or at your conversion either. Oh, if where one power over which Jesus had not had dominion, it would have been in vain for

him to pursue you. He must then have said, well, there is a soul I should like to have, but then it is under those powers that I cannot get at it. There is a soul I should like to have, but it is so far off its sins are so many, afraid I shall never be able to reach it. There is a soul I should like to have, but its sins are so many and of so deadly a character and crimson dye that I question whether it is possible to make so vile a wretch anything else but what he is. No, no, no; none of these scruples. "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." Again, "And made him rule over kings." Now, a king, in scripture language, sometimes means not any one particular person; but when kings are spoken of mystically you will find it needful very often, as is here, to translate the word for the sake or explanation, and take the "king" to mean a ruling power, made him rule over the ruling powers. Now, sin is a ruling power, and Christ ruled over that; Satan is a ruling power, Christ ruled over that; the world is a ruling power Christ ruled over that; error is a ruling power, and it is enough to make one's heart bleed to think of it, rules over millions of so-called Christians to the present moment; error, feasible error. But Jesus has dominion over that, put that down. Death is a ruling power, but Jesus had rule over it, and has put that down. Thus then, by faith in Jesus you are righteous; by faith in Jesus you go on gradually into the grace of God, blessing after blessing; by faith in Jesus you have dominion over all flesh; by faith in Jesus you have dominion over all powers.

Now Jesus Christ in the salvation of men has not only brought in righteousness, opened this way, submitted to the Father, has all nations in his hand and rules over all ruling powers, in order to set us free; but notice the next clause, "he gave them as the dust to his sword." I am very fond of that phrase, very fond. What is the sword? The word of God. If you had called Saul of Tarsus dust; Saul, why, your religion is nothing but the serpent's meat, it is of no more value than dust. You are blameless in the law? You are a very learned man, and you are a very clever man and you are a very holy man, and you are a very righteous man. Why, you are but dust and ashes. How he would have been insulted. Oh, he would have said, I will go to the priest directly, and get permission from him to put you to death, it insults my dignity in this way! But when Jesus came in, pierced his heart, divided asunder, as it were, soul and spirit, joints and marrow, brought him to the ground, then he felt that he was dust. Oh, what a moth, what a worthless, sinful, poor creature I am! Why, I am of no more value as regards any human merit, or any ground upon which I may claim any favor from God, I am of no more value than dust. Hence, said one of old, "Let not the Lord be angry that I who am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord." What say you to this? Has Jesus pursued us? Has his word so pierced us and so convinced us as to bring us down to know that our holiness is but dust that our righteousness is but dust, that we are but dust, that we are poor, worthless creatures, and that we are hastening to the dust of death: "Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return;" though in this dust of course there is a soul immortal, in this dust there is a soul containing in itself, folded at present, hidden capacities, mysterious powers, that will be brought into harmonious and perfect action in that world of perfection and everlasting light. Thus, they were given as the dust to his sword. Now this is true humility. I have preached, I was going to say, every word, I will not say every word, but every thought of this sermon to myself, and tried myself by it. I have thought to myself, Well, I can say that the word of Jesus has brought me to this. I can say that I am as dust as it were before the sword of the truth. I am brought down. And I thought, well, a more worthless creature cannot exist. Ah, these are they that will appreciate what Christ is. How, then, am I to get out of this dust? "Born of an incorruptible seed;" that is one step, washed in a Savior's blood is another, and clothed in his righteousness is another, his truth brought into the heart is another, brought into the bond of the everlasting covenant. What a

transition is this! Beautifully set before us in the resurrection of the body, here is the body brought into the dust. What a wondrous transition will that be from mortality to immortality, from corruption to incorruption, from weakness to strength, from dishonor to honor from degradation to everlasting glory? So, then, he gave them as the dust to his sword; and so, it is. The apostles went forth and used the sword of the spirit, and thousands of sinners were convinced of their state. It is hard work to let all our dignity go, and all our supposed worth, and to be nothing, or less than nothing; yet nothing short of this prepares us for the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then there is another clause; "and as driven stubble to his bow." I ask in the sight of a heart searching God and in the presence of this assembly, can anything be more spiritually feeble than we are apart from God's grace considered? Can anything be feebler? I am sure the talk in our day, they say, Ah, you must do so and so, but you must not do it in your own strength you have no power. You must not do it in your own strength. But how am I to get the Lord's strength? Oh, you must get the Lord's strength. Why, I can no more get the Lord's strength than I can create strength of my own. I can no more do that than anything else. Now hear what Job said upon this. His language may seem extreme; but those of you that know what poor feeble creatures you are in praying, in hearing the word, in everything spiritual; hear the language of Job in his 13th chapter at the 25th verse, "Will you break a leaf driven to and fro? and will you pursue the dry stubble?" That was Job's estimate of himself. "Will you pursue the dry stubble?" God is my witness, my feeling is this, O God, if you are pleased to destroy me, you can do it as easily as I could set fire to a piece of stubble; you can do it as easily as I can take a fan and blow away the dust from my presence. What am I? Ah, what am I? Job might well say, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Oh, my hearer; do ask yourself for once what a poor creature you are, I am sure I have said nothing this morning concerning Jesus Christ, however feeble my manner and humble my language, I have said nothing concerning him that is not acceptable to you. You will say, I am glad to hear of the righteousness he has wrought out and brought in; I am glad to hear he has obtained increased manifestations of Divine favor, until he has arrived at perfection; I am glad to hear that he sits at the Father's feet, that I might sit at his feet; I am glad to hear that the nations were given into his hands, that sinners ordained to eternal life might be taken out of those nations; I am glad to hear that he rules over all ruling powers; and now I am glad that he has made me sensible of what a poor piece of dry stubble and of dust I am, I will therefor boast no more.

"If I lisp a song of praise,
Each note shall echo, Grace, free grace."

Thus, then, by his mediatorial work he so pursued our sins, and so put an end to them, as to secure all I have stated, and ten thousand things more.

I must now, I suppose, step into the next part hastily: "He passed safely." Just see here a fourfold safety. And all this concerns us as well. First, his life was safe. If Satan could have robbed justice of this precious life of Christ, our life would have been lost. No disease could fasten upon his pure nature. Diseases, if I may for a moment personify them, looked at him, and one would say, I should like to take him by the throat; another, I should like to get him here, or there, by one of the vital organs; should like to take his life. But nothing could touch his pure nature, friends; yet he bore our sicknesses. His life was safe. There is the safety of our life. He is our life, and if he had not been safe we should not be safe; but as his life was safe, our life is safe. Your life is hidden with

Christ in God. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory." Second, safe as to his holiness; never tarnished. You see our life was destroyed in the first Adam, and the holiness in which we were created was destroyed. But Jesus Christ's holiness was not tarnished. He was born "that holy thing;" He remained pure, he remained holy. Oh, how the Christian delights in the purity of Christ. He is spoken of as our sanctification; we are proud of such, we delight in such, we glory in such, we sing of such, and shall forever. Oh, how bright must the church shine forth when she shall, as she certainly shall, appear in all her perfection and spotlessness of the Lamb of God? Third, he is safe as to his righteousness. He never did a wrong thing; no omission, no commission no deviation. How wonderful that is, is it not? He always did that right thing, at the right time, to the right people, in the right way, from the right motives, to the right end; everything right. And we are all wrong in and of ourselves; but our rejoicing shall be in the righteousness of Jesus. Fourth, error. Each Christian has to say concerning himself, "Who can understand his errors?" "Cleanse you me from secret faults." Some faults somewhere I do not know, somewhere I do not know anything of. But not one error in Jesus Christ; he never thought wrong, never spoke wrong, never did wrong never understood wrong. He often put his adversaries to silence, but they never could put him to silence. He often put questions to them that they could not answer, but they could never manufacture a question that he could not answer. Time does not permit me to enter into this, or else I might easily show that they held their council, got them an ingenuous question. He won't be able to answer this. You ask him about the resurrection he won't be able to answer that; the great commandment, won't be able to answer that; a great many other things. They made sure they had done it. Well, now, who are the cleverest men among us? Well there is A, and B, and C, and D; they are very clever men. Tell you what we will do; you go and watch, see if you can't catch something out of his mouth. Well, they went, but they were so astounded at his wisdom that when they came back again, What, have you not brought him? No. What, have you really not succeeded? No; "never man spoke like this man." What are you deceived also? "And they went every man to his own house." That is the best thing they could do, and a good thing if they had stopped there, that it certainly would. Then the next step, which I dare not enlarge upon, was his safety in death. He passed on safely there. What a number of restraints were put upon the adversary there! They could not break a bone of him; they could not bury him in the malefactor's grave. "He made his grave with the wicked," said the prophet; it is not said he was buried with them; the prophet does not say that; "he made his grave," by suffering himself to be crucified between two thieves. Now, as he was laid in the grave, what fools the rulers were; downright fools. What did they do? Went and rolled a stone to the mouth of the sepulcher. Oh, you fools, that is not the way to do it. What should we do, then? Why don't you go and take his body out and burn it? then he can't rise from the grave. That is what you should do. You have rolled the stone there, and left him there; why, he has got a good chance now of rising again. Why don't you light a fire and do as our fathers did, burn the body? then he can't rise from the dead. They either did not think of that, or else, if they had, the Lord would not have allowed them to do it. Remarkable thing, you see; they put him into a new tomb; with all their wisdom, and all their counsel, and all their demoniacal feeling, and all their savagism; God kept them from doing one indignity to his sacred body. He passed safely through the silent tomb. And here was the Savior's confidence. "You will not suffer your Holy One to see corruption," either by violence or any other means. As to the decomposition of his body, if it had laid there to this moment it would not have decomposed; for two reasons I can't, perhaps, convince some of you of the sentiment I hold, but the truth of it I cannot get rid of; first, because it was holy, and secondly, because, as I believe, his body was never severed from his deity. I believe that the omnipotence of deity was in his body; I

believe the vitality of deity was in his body; the soul had departed, but I believe divinity was there. Yes, I am tempted sometimes to go further upon that. I do think, though I do not mean further at present to enlarge upon the thought, but I do think if you could have said to the angel, Young man, or my Lord, or whatever you might call him, what makes your face to shine like lighting? His answer would have been simply looking at the place where the Lord lay. Well, how is it you sit on this stone, in defiance of the Roman soldiers, and in defiance of all adverse powers? It is the presence of Emmanuel, it is the presence of God. Well, but it is only his body. I say, "see the place where the Lord lay." I believe deity was there. They could not touch him. All this my friends, is to endear the Lord, increase our confidence in him, and illustrate the great truth "Hitherto shall you come, and no further." But your time is gone, and I must say no more.