

TWO OLIVE TREES

A SERMON

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“Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” Zechariah 4:4

BEFORE the Lord granted the vision, or rather visions, described in this chapter, the prophet appears to have fallen somewhere into a sleepy state, and to have thought that he did not very particularly need anything more. But, he says, “the angel that talked with me” this divine angel that talked from age to age with man upon the earth, and by and by tabernacled in our midst, and spoke as never man spoke, and still talks with men upon the earth concerning things that pertain to their welfare and to his eternal glory: “the angel that talked with me came again and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.” And though what the prophet saw seemed very simple, a golden candlestick yet he well knew that its mystical meaning was vitally important, as well as the meaning of the two olive trees by the side of it. The prophet therefore manifests great concern to understand what is meant by these two olive trees; and may it also be our concern this morning so to understand it as to profit by it. We must pay no attention to those men that tell us we are not to meddle with what they call these ambiguous scriptures, just as though there was any part of the Lord’s word upon which we are not to feed. Ever remember that the glorious gospel is a wide stretched pasture, and that we are not prohibited from feeding upon any part thereof the Lord is pleased to bring us into. I myself would be one of the last to preach or to hold a mere speculative feeling towards the holy scriptures. Our object therefore this morning shall be not merely to get at what we believe to be the meaning, but to be profited thereby. There are three things which I shall notice contained in our text. First: *the universal dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ*: he is here called “the Lord of the whole earth.” Secondly: *the representations of the Old and New Testament Churches*: “These are the two anointed ones.” the two witnesses, “that stand.” as the representation of the Old and New Testament Church. Thirdly, we have here, *the faithfulness of these anointed ones*; they “stand by the Lord of the whole earth;” that is they are faithful unto death and shall receive at last a crown of everlasting life.

First, then, we have here *the universal dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Now, let us understand this. This universal dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ must not be understood in the mere abstract

sense, but in the relative sense. For instance, the first Adam held a Paradise, an Eden, a world for all his posterity. That was the position in which he stood with all things under his command. But the Fall takes place, and Adam and the whole human race are involved in the awful scene described in God's word, and which it is a part of our happy lot to understand and to be concerned about. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is the last Adam, and he came and acquired universal dominion on behalf of his people. If we can work this point out to show that the dominion which he achieved as Mediator is on behalf of the people, you will at once see that Jesus Christ is the way of confidence in God, of access to God, of entire, universal, and final victory. But let us come to details. First, then, the Savior obtained universal dominion by prevailing with God. This is a truth self-evident, but none the less blessed and important. The Lord Jesus Christ did by his obedient life to God's law prevail with God; and if love in the perfection thereof be the full filing of the law, then the Lord Jesus Christ did in the perfection thereof love the Lord his God with all his heart, and all his mind, and all his strength, and his neighbor as himself. In a word, whatever perfection, whether of love, of holiness, or wisdom, or integrity, whatever perfection you may name, the Savior possessed them all. And it is pleasing, it is delightful, to read that "the Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake." See how nicely David understood this when he said, "I will make mention of your righteousness, even of your only." And what a beautiful representation Isaiah gives of this when he said, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." We may wonder how this can be; how it is that we are taken into such safeguard, such security, and made to occupy such an advantageous position, that no weapon that is formed against us, whether it be sin, or Satan, or life, or death, let it be what it may, shall prosper; and that every tongue (and yet many tongues may with truthfulness accuse us before God), "every tongue that shall rise in judgment against you, you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord." And then the secret comes out; so, you see we are perfectly right in renouncing all our own supposed righteousness and receiving the testimony of Christ's righteousness: "Their righteousness is of me, says the Lord." Now this righteousness, this obedient life of the Lord Jesus Christ, has prevailed with God's law, has prevailed with justice; in a word, it has prevailed with God. It is impossible upon this subject to say anything greater than that said by the apostle, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." Let us take here, as we very often do, the word "righteousness" to mean the whole of the humiliation work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He, then, has thus prevailed with God. "It is God that justifies." He brings us to believe, as the apostle describes. "Now to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And the apostle gives us to understand the secret of the blessedness into which faith in Christ lets us; "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God." This is one step, then, towards the Savior's universal dominion, God's unexceptionable approbation of his righteousness, God's deep and eternal interest in Christ's righteousness, God's everlasting delight in Christ's righteousness. I say God's deep interest in it, because it is by him that his dear children are made pleasing in his sight, it is by him that his children are made righteous in his sight, it is by him that all his children shall be brought into sweet reconciliation unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, he having imputed them to his dear Son, and imputed righteousness to them without works. So, they themselves were sinners thirsting for God's mercy, led to understand this great subject, and to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the way in which God is well pleased. Enoch, before his translation, had this testimony, that he pleased God; in other words, that he was pleasing to God; and without faith to receive what Christ has done, it is impossible to please or to be pleasing to God. Let us go a little farther. When the Savior came to

die, was there in the whole universal church one sin that he did not conquer? Was there one demand of justice that he did not meet? Was there one adversary that he did not overcome? Was there any one department of the territories of the enemy, all embodied in the idea of death, that he did not destroy? "He destroyed him that had the power of death; that is, the devil." It will take eternity itself to tell out the full meaning of those words, "It is finished." Thus, then, as the Lord Jesus Christ on the one hand did no sin, neither was gull found in his mouth, there is the negative, that he did no wrong; but on the other hand, he always did those things, in life and in death, that pleased God, he has hereby acquired universal or entire dominion. He is the last Adam, that has acquired, not that which the first Adam lost, I will not say that, for that would be viewing the Savior too low a great deal; we must view the Lord Jesus Christ as obtaining a better dominion than the first Adam ever had. Hear the Savior describe his own dominion: "You have given him power", it is a matter of right, "over all flesh, that he should give eternal life unto as many as you have given him." What shall I say to the practical part of this? I must say but little, because we have other things to attend to. But that you are favored to understand and to lay hold of Christ's righteousness as your hope for time and eternity, our condemnation is literally and utterly impossible. You will be brought to lay hold, in a way of understanding, confidence, hope, and decision, on the atonement of Jesus Christ, and God leave you, God forsake you, the Lord not make you a conqueror, not give you the victory? Why, your victory is sure as that Christ is in heaven. Those that have gone before us overcame by the same work (and they had as much to overcome as we have), "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." I do feel increasingly anxious that you should understand the scriptures, for a clear understanding especially of the gospel parts of the Bible is an inlet to many delights, to many endearments. I am sure that many of the people of God would love him more if they understood the scriptures better; but for want of a clearer understanding of what he has done, we often doubt and fear, and tremble, whether we know anything at all or not. I desire to bless God for knowing what it is to fear and to tremble; still there is such a thing as that beautiful experience described by the apostle when he says, "Thanks be unto God, that always causes us to triumph in Christ." Why, you are sure to prevail. What sinner ever yet laid hold of the princely righteousness, of the princely atonement of Jesus, and did not prevail? The Lord said to Jacob, "As a prince", that is, as Christ Jesus he is a Prince, "have you power with God and with men, and have prevailed." Jesus then is by his mediatorial work rightfully the Lord of the whole earth; he has dominion over all.

But let us come down now to some of the symptoms of this while the Savior was in this world. In the first place, he cast out devils; there is his power over hell. Devils could not cast him out; devils trembled at him. "Are you come to torment us before the time?" But he never trembled at them. Devils besought him, but he never besought them. He suffered them to go into the herd of swine. I sometimes think of this feature of his blessed life when you sing those words:

"Devils at your presence flee,
Blest is the man that trusts in you."

Ah, then there is the power. "He shall tread Satan down under your feet shortly." If you are brought to stand before this angel of the everlasting covenant, Satan will resist you, but his resistance will be in vain, for when Jesus comes, Satan must fly. See then the Savior's dominion over hell. And to denote his entire conquest over hell, he has the keys. "I have the keys of hell." Satan has lost his own keys; he has lost all authority. The Savior has authority over hell. Some of the old divines

used to say (and they could in those days speak out, they were not quite so nicely-mouthed as people are now, so they could speak out without being reproached for using extreme expressions by some of their mealy-mouthed brethren), they used to say that as Jesus Christ had the keys of hell, if Satan should by some extraordinary ingenuity get one of his sheep into hell, why, the devil could not keep him in, for Christ has the keys, and would soon have him out again; and so he would. Not that they held, nor do I hold, that a child of God can be there, but it is a mode of speech to set forth the completeness of the Savior's victory over hell. He has the keys of hell. Does death come in his way? Ah, there is Lazarus; death has got him. Yes, but death shall not keep him. "Lazarus, come forth." Death is frightened, runs away, and leaves Lazarus alone; could not hold him. And is the widow's son being carried along? Satan says, Here is your Jesus of Nazareth, and yet here is this widow's son just going to be buried. Ah, the Savior touched the bier; "I say unto you, young man, Arise." Death could not hold him; he did arise, and began to speak. And is Jairus' daughter dead? Jesus comes and the hired mourners laughed him to scorn when he said, "She is not dead, but sleeps." She was dead, but he meant it only as a sleep, and he soon brought her to life. And need I remind you of his dying, when many that were in their graves felt the tremendous shock of that event, and came out of their graves after his resurrection. He himself took death in its worst form, and he could not be held of it. Then need I remind you of sin? Why, he pardoned one and another. Did he not say to the poor palsied man, "Son", ah, you are a son, "you have a secret and eternal relationship," you do not know it yet, but you will know it, "Son, your sins are forgiven you"! The woman at his feet, "Her sins, which are many, are all forgiven her." And so again and again. Then diseases, what disease was ever too hard for him? They all fled at his presence. Then again, the sea; he walks on the sea; and no sooner is he received into the ship than there is a great calm. Just a word thrown into the sea by the power and presence of his Deity (for he was God as well as man), and the sea was silenced, and there was a great calm. They might well be astonished. While he silenced the sea, the sea could not silence him. He silenced many, but they could not silence him. So, when he came to his dying hour, the whole globe we inhabit trembled, and it was felt hundreds of miles off. It is spoken of as an earthquake, expressive of the tremulousness of the shock. There was an exercise then of omnipotent power on our behalf that the globe itself could hardly bear up under. But Christ bore up under it; he retained full and perfect self-possession, until he said, "It is finished." But time would fail me to show the Savior's dominion over the various departments of nature. See how he fed the multitude with the loaves and the fishes, whatever he put his hand to, he always prevailed. Take that scripture in the 42nd of Isaiah, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged," neither was he; he never failed in a single thing. It is very pleasing to think of it. Now you that are Wesleyans, what do you think of this? You believe that he takes hold of a poor sinner today, and let's go of him tomorrow. Now you know that is wrong, because he says that none shall pluck them out of his hand. And if he did not fail in his humiliation, with all our sins upon him, and all the demands of justice, how much less shall he fail now? Thus than, by the mediatorial work of Christ, here is all the dominion we need. We have by that work God, in his self-existence, in his eternity, in all his counsels, in all his promises, in all his providences, entirely on our side; and the apostle might well say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If he be not for us, then vain is the help of man; and if God be for us, then vain is the hindrance of man. Well then, and I can say of this trouble, and that, and the other, I have not that dominion over them that I could wish, but Jesus Christ has; and whatever dominion he has over your sin, he will give that dominion to you by and by; whatever dominion he has over death, he will give it to you by and by; whatever dominion he has over grief and sorrow, he will give you

that dominion by and by. Whatever dominion he possesses, he will give to you. "The glory which you gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."

I will now notice secondly *the representatives of the Old and New Testament churches*; the two anointed ones. Now these two anointed ones are called in the Book of the Revelation "two witnesses." I will try and prove that these two olive trees, these two witnesses, represent the Old Testament church and the New Testament church. Let us get an explanation of this from the last chapter of the Book of Daniel. There is in that chapter revealed to Daniel the interposition of Michael, "the great prince which stands for the children of your people;" and that there was to be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation upon the earth. Of course, that time of trouble meant the destruction of the Jewish nation; and the reason why that was such a time of trouble as never was before was because they recovered from their former captivities; but from this final scattering by the Romans they will never recover. They are dispersed and scattered forever: and there is no more hope now for the Jews in the land of Canaan than there is in Satan himself; the hope of every man now, Jew and Gentile, must be in Christ Jesus the Lord. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." "At that time your people" Daniel's people, the people of the Lord, "shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Daniel thus sees Christ in his life and death standing on this earth as Job saw him; "He shall stand at the latter day," that is, the latter day of the Jewish dispensation, "upon the earth." Daniel saw that, and he saw that thousands should rejoice that their names were written in heaven, and they should be delivered. Now come the two witnesses. Daniel saw a river; that river of course is the gospel. "I looked, and behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river." Now there was one standing on Daniel's side of the river. You know on which side of the river Daniel stood; he stood on the Old Testament side of the river; and the other, standing on the opposite side, represents the New Testament church. Let us see what the river is. There was a man clothed with linen upon the waters of the river; that is, this angel of the covenant was enthroned, and by his enthronement this river rolled forth. Is it not just so? Go to Ezekiel, and you find that the waters issued from under the threshold; that is, they came, as it were, by the sacrifice, by the mercy seat; they came out from the right side of the house, the south side of the altar, not the law side of the altar, but the gospel side; and John says, "I saw a river proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb." Now the Lord Jesus Christ, having obtained the victory, having quenched the fire that fell upon him, having met the fiery sword, having destroyed death, the curse, famine, the enemy, destroyed everything that would have destroyed us, he is now enthroned, and by his enthronement the waters of eternal life have come down to this dead world, and have given life to untold millions, and we trust will yet give life to innumerable millions more. This river David understood when he said. "There is a river," through the Jewish earth be carried into the midst of the sea, and this earth as far as we are concerned by and by shall be nothing to us, "yet there is a river the streams whereof make glad the city of God." Jesus Christ then being above the waters mean his enthronement, as in Ezekiel, and as in the last chapter of the Book of the Revelation. Take away Christ's enthronement, his victory, his resurrection, his ascension, his intercession, his reign, and not a drop of the water of life could reach lost and ruined man: not a promise, not a testimony, not a particle of grace or mercy; for all grace, all mercy, all favor, are by Jesus Christ. As he himself says, "The water that I shall give you shall be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." There were two men; one stood on the Old Testament side of this gospel river that should proceed from the throne of God and the Lamb, the throne of grace, the throne of mercy, the throne of life, and light, and glory; one stood

on Daniel's side of the river, and the other on the opposite side. And the one that stood on Daniel's side of the river said, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" Now the one that stood on the other side of the river did not ask that, because he represents the New Testament Church; and the New Testament Church would not say, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" for the Wonderful One has come, and has done wondrously; the Wonderful One has wondrously magnified the law, wondrously atoned for sin, wondrously conquered death, wondrously saved our souls, and brought to light the deep wonders of everlasting love and infinite counsels. Therefore, the one standing on the New Testament side of the river does not ask how long it shall be, because he represents those that should stand in the light of what the Savior had actually done. So, that John the Baptist, who was near the accomplishment, was greater than all the preceding prophets, because he stood nearer in his official capacity to the completeness of the Savior's work than the preceding prophets, and yet the least apostle was greater than he, because John died before Christ died; but the least apostle could say what John could not say. John spoke in the current tense "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world; "but the least apostle lived to say, "He has done it; He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Here are the two witnesses. One of these witnesses represents the minister, and thereby represents the whole Church. Why does he stand by the river? Why, because the burden of the Old Testament minister was, as he stood by the river of the gospel, "Ho, every one that thirsts, come you to the waters." I am brought to the river of God, which is full of water; I have drunk of the river of his pleasures. The Old Testament minister takes up his standing there, according to God's promise, "With weeping and with supplications I will lead them, even by the rivers of water, in a straight way, where in they shall not stumble." So, the Old Testament prophet took up his position there, and the Old Testament Church found her life, her glory, and her blessedness there. They drank of the river of God's pleasures full of water; they drank, and lifted up their heads, and saw this eternal salvation. And what says the New Testament minister; the first minister, Christ Himself? "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." And what does the New Testament Church say? The Spirit touches the sinner, gives him a knowledge of what he is as a sinner, and makes him thirst for mercy; the Spirit thus says, "Come," and the Bride joins with the Spirit, and says to the thirsty soul, "Come; and let him that hears," namely, the minister, "say Come; and whosoever will", so, if you have no thirst worth speaking of, or very little indeed, yet if you have the will, that is accepted "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Thus, you will see that the one standing on Daniel's side of the river represents first the Old Testament minister, and thereby the Old Testament Church; the other, standing on the opposite side, represents the New Testament minister, and thereby the New Testament Church, the river, and these two witnesses, representing the Old and the New Testament Church. If what I am now saying be true, what becomes of the fable of the present day, that the Old Testament Church did not know this, and that, and the other? These two men, representing the Old and the New Testament Church, both stood by one river. It was but one river. One Jesus Christ for the Old and the New Testament Church, one river of mercy, one God, one gospel, one sworn promise, just the same. So that when you get home to heaven if you were to ask one of your Old Testament brethren, "What had you to slake your thirst? he would answer, Well, I drank of the free grace river of God's grace; and you would say, I drank of the river of the water of life, both the same. We have both the same God, the same Jesus Christ, the same love, the same salvation, the same mercy. What a sweet unity will run through all the armies of heaven! They will have but one heart, I was going to say, one voice, one song, one God, one Mediator, one kingdom, and that to eternity. The 11th of Hebrews will show you that. But again, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" The angel then gives Daniel a note of time when these wonders are to

be accomplished, that is, when Christ is to bring in righteousness, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, when the Holy Spirit is to descend, when the Gentiles are to be brought in, and the New Testament Church established. These are the wonders. And this divine angel lifted up both his hands to heaven, "and swore by him that lives forever that it shall be for time, times, and a half;" that is, the Lord has appointed one time for one thing; when that is done, then another time for another thing; and when that is done, then another time for another thing. But Daniel, while you cannot understand how long it is, I will give you a note of time to be understood relatively, not telling you how many years it shall be; Daniel had too much sense to take it literally, for he says, "I heard, but I understood not;" whereas if the seventy weeks were to be taken literally, he would have known to the very day. But what is the note of the time? "When he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished." There is the note of time. The "holy people" in this passage does not mean the Jews; they had ceased to be holy; they had become a part of the mystic Babylon; there was not a more unholy people on the face of the earth than they were. Who were the holy people, then, whose power he was to scatter? If you go to the 4th verse of the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, you will there get the note of time explained. "They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." There it is. Therefore, the scattering there means distribution. God took advantage of the persecution to which the disciples were subjected, and they were scattered abroad into the Gentile world. Scatter their power abroad, that is, diffuse their power. They went and spoke the word with power east, west, north, and south. And when you shall thus see the apostles and their companions scattered east, west, north, and south, that shall be one of the notes of time that the Messiah has come, that death's conquered, that he has ascended on high, and that the great mission is given, "Go you and preach the gospel to all the world." Was not that a true note of time? There are a great many notes of time given; but I must not branch out upon them, though they tempt me. How is Paul to get to Caesar's court? He did get there, and you know how he got there:

"If Paul in Caesars court must stand,
He need not fear the sea;
Secured from harm on every hand,
By the divine decree."

And how was Peter brought down to Caesarea? And how was the gospel carried by the eunuch? His mission was very different from our expedition into the same region, Abyssinia. The gospel was preached to him; he became a Baptist there and then, and went up into his own country, and there told "to sinners round what a dear Savior he had found." The Old Testament prophets did not know the precise time, but they knew the things; they knew what should come to pass; they knew the Messiah would come, they knew that he would prevail. And Daniel was so established in God's truth as to rejoice in his eternal security. Now, Daniel, you can understand this; "Go your way." I know what your way is, Daniel; your way is faith in the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, and there is no symptom of that stone being overcome, but that stone overcomes everything. Your way, Daniel, I know is that Messiah I have revealed to you. "Go your way till the end be for you shall rest;" your work is done, your sins forgiven, your foes conquered, and all is well; "you shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days." What the Lord said to one he says to all. If you have but a grain of faith in your heart, those words as much belong to you as they did to Daniel; "Go your way;" Christ is your way; "for you shall rest;" and he is your rest; "and stand in your lot," and he is your lot; and you shall stand in him, and be found in him, not

having your own righteousness, which would be of the law, to your condemnation, but that righteousness which is of God, to your justification and to your eternal glorification.

Now these two witnesses are spoken of very majestically in the 11th of the Revelation; but our time is nearly gone, so I must leave that for another occasion. They are spoken of there most charmingly, most beautifully; and if the Lord should bring it in spirit and life into my soul, I will give you a sermon upon it, not else. I never can preach comfortably upon a text unless I have some reason to believe the Lord has given it to me. When it comes to me with power, illumination, solemnity, or cheerfulness, I feel it is a message from God's throne. As for some men that preach half a dozen gospels in one sermon, they can never have tasted the good old wine of the everlasting gospel, or they would not desire the new wine of human invention, but repudiate the whole, and abide fast by the truth as it is in Jesus.

But lastly, *the faithfulness of these anointed ones*; "they stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Oh, how did the Old Testament prophets stand like iron pillars, defended cities, and brazen walls, by the truth as it is in Jesus. So, the apostles; how firmly they stood by the Lord. Just so now, and down to the end of time; so that the Lord will say to each of his children at the last, "Well done, you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord."

Here, then, is Christ's entire dominion; here is, secondly, the river of the gospel; here are, thirdly, the Old and New Testament churches sweetly united in the same theme; here is, fourthly, a clear note of time when these wonders were by the mediator accomplished; and here is, lastly, the faithfulness of the Old and of the New Testament churches. May the Lord keep us in the same, faithful unto death, then we shall receive a crown of life.