

HEAVENLY LIFE

A SERMON

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“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” Psalm 150:6

THESE words taken spiritually will mean the praiseful and the pleasing service of the Lord and indicate the great truth that when the excellency of the service of the Lord is once perceived by the soul taught of God, that soul enters with great willingness, eagerness, and zeal, upon the service of the Lord. Why, if we take a man literally who has no employment; if he be an honest man, and really wishes to live honestly and to work honestly, if he meets with a situation, and almost as soon as he meets with it he sees it is that kind of situation that by honesty, industry, and perseverance, he will as surely make his fortune as that he is a man, and that he will as surely die a rich man as that he is now a poor man; with what delight such an one would enter upon that service; he would say, This indeed is a providence. And yet even this falls infinitely short of the service of the Lord; for the man that enters upon the service of the Lord, being prospered, and enabled to keep his heart with all diligence, and to serve the Lord diligently, why, that man shall acquire kingdoms, that man shall acquire unsearchable riches, that man shall acquire all that shall be his security for life; and whatever he shall acquire he will not be called upon to do with as the man who has obtained temporal things; he presently has to will them to somebody else, and he himself must die, and leave them all. Not so with the servants of the Lord, they all their treasures with them bear; all that they acquire of spiritual wealth on this side of Jordan they shall take with them through Jordan, and enjoy to all eternity. And besides, to be a praiseful, willing servant of the Lord, see what promises are made to such in this life. The Lord says of his servants even in this life, and of course the words will stretch on to the last great day, that “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, and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord.” And if I were asked to give a sample of the blessedness of serving the Lord, I might go to the 7th of Revelation, and see a number there that no man could number: all these were once the servants of the Lord, all these were once struggling here below, all these were once believers in Jesus Christ, all these were sinners saved by grace. Oh, what a delightful service, then, is the service of the Lord; and if it is not so in our estimation, it is because we do not understand it. Hence you read again and again of entering in at his gates with praise, being thankful unto him, and blessing his name; and you read also of making a joyful noise unto the Lord. It is true, we can serve him in this willing and praiseful way only when he is pleased to enable us to do so. It is a great thing to follow the Lord at all; and

we had better follow him slowly and mournfully than not follow him at all; and we had better serve him ever so feebly and ever so weakly, so that we are sincere, and desire yet to serve him more and to glorify him more, than not to be concerned at all. I shall therefore make no apology whatever for taking the text in a clearly spiritual sense of the words. That the Lord is entitled to praise from all his creatures is a doctrine I never denied. But then the very few moments we are together, our desire must be to attend to spiritual things; and may the Lord this morning call our attention to spiritual things, and enable us to understand them, and to trace out the way in which he so deals with men as to turn the dead into the living, his enemies into his friends, and the servants of sin and Satan into the servants of the most high God. I shall therefore take the words spiritually, and look at the breath here spoken of, "Everything that has breath," as representing a new and spiritual existence. I will first notice *the note of distinction*; "Everything that has breath." Secondly, *the order in which such are to praise the Lord*. And we ought to have, though time will not admit it, a third thought, and that is, *the happy consequences of being so employed*.

First, *the note of distinction*, the new existence here indicated: "Everything that has breath." Now if this breath is made to represent life and liberty, then it is that of which we all by nature are destitute. And in fact, our text, taking it spiritually, brings before us that which I think ought always more or less to be brought before the people, and this is, that one great essential to salvation, regeneration: that one great essential to the salvation of the soul, the work of the Eternal Spirit. Let us then take the word of the Lord as our guide in this all essential and important matter. The Lord has been pleased in the 37th of Ezekiel to represent the whole election of grace; for the dry bones in that valley are spoken of as the whole house of Israel; not the whole house of Israel nationally or literally, but the whole house of Israel spiritually; not the nation of the Jews as a nation, but another nation that is spoken of by Isaiah when he says, "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will hasten it in his time;" and the nation also spoken of by Peter when he said, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." Here then you will see that those dry bones represent the whole election of grace; for every one of the dry bones came to life, and the way in which they came to life is for me presently very minutely and carefully to describe. And you will observe that in the 11th of Ezekiel the remnant of the Lord's people are called "all the house of Israel;" for the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, your brethren, even your brethren, the men of your kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord; unto us is this land given in possession." Here is a people called "all the house of Israel wholly, to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem said," so here are the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all the house of Israel wholly, "Get you far from the Lord." Now I believe Popery boasts of its antiquity, and it may do so justly; for here you have Popery in its ancient form; here you have a people saying to the remnant according to the election of grace, called "all the house of Israel wholly," because they were everything to the Lord, and the others were nothing, Get you far from this place, you heretics; you do not believe in our traditions, you do not believe in the traditions of the elders, you do not believe in our Church, you do not believe in the authority of the Church, and therefore get you far from the Lord, you high doctrine, Antinomian, dangerous characters, you don't belong to the Lord. And so, they persecuted them, so they persecuted the prophets; and when the embodiment of the whole house of Israel came, namely, Jesus Christ, what did the same spirit say to him? Get you far from the Lord; unto us is this place given in possession; you Jesus of Nazareth, you do not belong to our Church; you have pronounced woes upon all our doctrines, therefore get you far from hence, you do not belong to the Lord. And so, they crucified him. Therefore, we will give Popery the honor

of antiquity. Looking then at the fact that there is a people called a nation, and called the whole house of Israel, which must be understood spiritually to mean the whole election of grace, those dry bones in the 37th of Ezekiel are made to represent our state by nature, and then made to represent the way in which the Lord brings us to life, and then made to represent the happy destiny of the people of God.

Now Ezekiel said, "The hand of the Lord was upon me." With him it was vision; he saw it in vision; we see that take place, one here, one there, one in another place, which he saw, as it were, as though it took place altogether or all at once, which it did in vision, as revealed to him. "The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the spirit;" not, you see, in the flesh, but in the spirit; it is something that belongs to the soul, to eternity, something infinitely weightier than anything merely temporal. "And set me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about," caused me to look at them on all sides. And after the prophet had examined them on all sides, he could only come to the conclusion that while they were very many in the open valley, they were all very dry. Oh, what a solemn representation of our state by nature! Just as the bone was literally dead and dry, just so are we spiritually while in a state of nature. And mark, they were all "in the open valley;" there was no defense, there was no shelter, but all in the open valley. Just so you when in a state of nature; there you were in the open valley of this world. What a miracle of mercy that you were not then cut down, and sent to your own place, namely, hell; for all of us thus situated, while in a state of nature, as far as we were concerned, were exposed to eternal damnation. It is true the Lord had a love to us and a purpose concerning us; but then no thanks to us that he who is rich in mercy loved us even when dead in trespasses and in sins. They were very many and very dry. Now the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" And Ezekiel's answer is very solemn, and at the same time very beautiful; he said, "O Lord God, you know." The prophet didn't attempt to invite them to live; he didn't ask of them to live; he didn't beg of them to live. The prophet certainly did not hold that doctrine, that is to say, not as a new covenant prophet. As an old covenant prophet, he of course invited the Jews from time to time to reformation, saying, "Why will you die?" all that is temporal, and belongs to the old covenant. But when we come to vital matters, there are the people dead, as represented by these bones; and so, the prophet knew how absurd, and worse than absurd, it would be to attempt to ask these bones to live, or to invite them to live. It would have been a virtual denial of the real condition of these bones. Therefore, he appeals to God; he says, "O Lord God, you know." And then the Lord began to reveal his mind; and I shall want your attention very strictly as I go along, for more reasons than one; one reason is because this chapter is referred to in order to authorize the doctrine of universal invitation; and as we go along we shall see that this same chapter cuts up root and branch the very doctrine that they run to this chapter to confirm, and so pervert it. Now the Lord said to the prophet, "Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." There, you see, is the natural man brought under the word. Hence it is right that every Christian should get all he can to hear the word; for though a man cannot quicken his own soul, and you can do nothing for him, still "faith comes by hearing." You see on the day of Pentecost what was done by the simplicity of preaching and of hearing. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." "O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." That was the Lord's command. And then the Lord said, "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you." Now here is nothing uncertain about it. You see the bone is not appealed to in order to do a single thing. "I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live; and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you

shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” That is the end of these dealings, they are to know the Lord. Then Ezekiel said, “I prophesied as I was commanded.” Now what did Ezekiel say? He repeated what the Lord said, Ezekiel did not alter the message, but he said, “O you dry bones, thus says the Lord God; I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.” Ezekiel knew there was no uncertainty about it; he knew the word of the Lord should not return void; he knew that it should accomplish what the Lord pleased; he knew that it should prosper in the thing whereunto the Lord sent it. Why, I am a total and utter stranger to preaching in a spirit of uncertainty. Every sermon that I preach will have the effect that the Lord designs it to have, as sure as I exist. I come with no uncertainty whatever. No infirmities of mine shall hinder the word from doing what the Lord intends it shall do; and no talents or gifts of mine, had it been my lot to have had such talents or gifts, had it been my lot to have been eloquent, as an orator, no such things could add anything. It is God that does it all. “And there was a noise there was something moving now. Ah, when the sinner begins to be convinced of what a sinful creature he is, like a dry bone, worthless, disjointed from God, from all hope and from all help, and utterly worthless, a sort of thing that a living creature would kick out of the way, and say, “Bury the dead out of my sight;” when the sinner is thus convinced, there is a noise; he begins to sigh, and his sins make a noise in his conscience, and troubles make a noise in his heart; there is a tempest in his soul; he is brought into the secret place of thunder. Ah, he says to himself, there is nothing so concerns me, after all, as the eternal salvation of my soul. “There was a noise and behold a shaking.” The sinner trembles, and he is shaken out of his carelessness, shaken out of his false confidences, shaken out of his sleep; he has effectually heard the Lord say to him, “What mean you, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon your God.” “Awake, you that sleeps, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.” There was a noise and a shaking, a trembling, and a fearing. And if you know anything of regeneration, the word of the Lord has more or less had this effect upon you; it has created a noise in your conscience that can never be quieted but by a realization of God’s pardoning mercy; it has given rise to a kind of shaking, and trembling, and fearing, that can never be overcome but by a revelation to your soul with power divine of God’s everlasting love. Never can this noise be quieted, and a better noise put into its place, never can this trembling be entirely stopped, but by a revelation to you of what Christ has done for you, that he has borne your sins away, brought in eternal righteousness, and that God is on your side. Mark, the prophet deals in no invitations, no offers, no uncertainty. God declared that he would put breath into these dry bones, and that he would do the rest that he said; and the noise and shaking were to the prophet a proof that God had begun the work. And so, it is now, when a poor sinner’s sins and his condition as a sinner make a noise to him, and he begins to tremble, it is a sign the work is begun.

And now mark the prophet’s testimony. He says, while there was a noise and shaking, “the bones came together, bone to his bone.” Each believer shall find out Christ, for he is the center of unity, and by coming to Christ you come to your fellow members. You cannot come into right unity to your fellow-members of Christ, or to your brethren, but by being united to Christ by faith and receiving him. That is the way bone comes together to his bone; hence called the unity of the spirit, and the unity of the faith; and here “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” So, the prophet said, “And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them;” yes, the ligaments to unite them, and form them into shape, and the flesh to cover them. They shall be good, strong, muscular Christians. Take notice, “bone came together to his bone;” that will give the outline of the form; “and I will lay sinews upon you;” that will enable the joints to act. When the Lord makes a Christian, he means that man to act; he means him to have some

springs of action about him. he shall not be a poor, dormant, dead sort of thing; he is formed for service; he is formed for God; he is formed to stand out in this ungodly world for the blessed God. "And flesh came upon them, and they were covered with skin." There is no uncertainty about it, you see. And how did the prophet bring this about? By simply declaring God's truth. "I prophesied as I was commanded."

But the breath represents not only life but also liberty, these two things. Hence you know, if you are under any very great trouble, and some sudden almost, or peculiar interposition of Providence appears on your behalf, you say, I can breathe now; I feel free now. Just so spiritually. You may be alive, but there is a bondage in the soul; there is a something wanting; but by and by, when the Lord brings liberty into the soul, and you feel that you are free for life and death and eternity, Ah, say you, I can breathe now; I am alive now. But let us follow this matter out. There was no breath in them, no liberty, and yet they were out of death too. There is the noise, and the shaking, and the unity to Christ; and there are the sinews, fitting them for action; and there is the flesh and muscles, to denote they shall be muscular, strong Christians; and there is the skin, immortal, to beautify them; not like our mortal skin, growing old, withered, and becoming by and by like a piece of parchment almost, if we live long enough, and then mingling with the dust: not so in this new creature-ship; it is always fresh, always young, always new. We speak of the Savior as the ancient One, but we can never speak of him as the aged One, for he can never grow old; and the saints, as they are in him, can never grow old. Hence you will find, when angels have appeared (and they are some thousands of years old), they are sometimes called young men; and so, when the prophets have appeared, when one appeared to John in the book of the Revelation, he appeared as a young man. Ancient, if you like, but not aged. Thus, then, the Lord forms these people for himself. "Then said the Lord unto me, prophesy unto the wind," the wind there of course mystically meaning the person and personal power of the holy, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal Spirit of the living God. I love that part of the chapter; it is so beautiful; not a single thing left for the dry bones; the whole of it is done by the Lord himself. There is not any appeal made to them; there is a command to them to hear the word, and by means of hearing the Lord brings them to life and carries on the work. "Prophesy unto the wind; prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So, I prophesied as he commanded me." Ah, I didn't appeal to the bones, I asked the Holy Spirit to come. Ah, I said, Awake, O north wind, and come, you south, and blow upon these bones, that they may live. "I prophesied as he commanded me." The prophet had just the same confidence in the omnipotence and certainty of the Holy Spirit as in the omnipotence and certainty of the Father's counsels, and of the victory the dear Redeemer should achieve. The prophet was a thorough Trinitarian. It was the eternal Spirit that showed him these things. "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." The Holy Spirit, in the universality of his power, concentrating upon these dry bones the everlasting love of God, concentrating upon these dry bones the electing grace of God, the mediatorial perfection of the dear Redeemer, the immutable counsels of the eternal God, the Holy Spirit grasping these eternal truths, and concentrating them upon the dry bones, brought the whole of them into all the vitality of eternal love, of eternal choice, of mediatorial achievement, of immutability, with the prospect of eternal victory; and so great was the work that "they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army;" they took a defiant attitude; and that is what the soul must come to that is thus taught of God. "Let everything that has" this heavenly "breath praise the Lord." Ah, say you, I am a poor thing. Well, the Lord knows that. "Let everything." So, if you are a poor thing, a helpless thing, a

worthless thing, a stupid thing, a sinful thing, and all sorts of things you may call yourself, still you are one of the living things. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Thus, then, look at our state by nature; see how faith came by hearing; see the noise, the shaking, and the unity; see the sinews for action, the muscles for strength, the skin for beauty, and then see the eternal Spirit grasping infinity, concentrating infinity upon these dry bones, and bringing them up out of finitude into infinity. Oh, when they stood up, and looked back, and saw their names in life's fair book set down, and could look forward and behold eternal joys their own, they might all with one tremendous shout make hell tremble, heaven rejoice, its arches echo with "What shall we fear what man can do unto us, seeing what God has done and will do?" "Let everyone that has" this spiritual "breath praise the Lord." So, here is no coaxing, no inviting, no you shall and you shan't, and you must and you can't, none of this: here are the bones just as they are, and here is the process, the whole of it lying with the Lord. Let us notice one more thing in the process. The Lord says, "These bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried." Ah, when did they say this? Not till life came into the soul. David says, "My bones are burnt as a hearth," meaning, everything is burnt up by sin. We are so burnt up by sin, and blackened by sin, that we are nothing but poor, worthless, helpless creatures. Our very bones are dried, they said. How came they to say this? The Lord quickened them and made them see it and feel it. "And our hope is lost." How came you to find that out? You do not find the natural man talk like that. You go to the greatest criminal now in any of our jails, and if he were on his dying bed, that is, supposing him to be a graceless man, if grace does not find out the criminal, and save him as it did the thief on the cross; and you say to him, Now you have lived a dreadful life; have you any hope? Yes, he says, I have a hope. You have been a great criminal. Oh yes; but I have known some criminals do what I have never done; I have never robbed on a Sunday; and besides, I have never robbed a Dissenting parson; and another says, I have never robbed a Church clergyman. You will always find they have something or another as a reason why they should hope. But when God comes in and cuts the sinner up root and branch, he says, I have no hope as a sinner; as a sinner I have not one reason to assign why the great God should not banish me from his presence, and say to me at the last, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." I have no hope; and if ever I get a hope, it must be the gift of God by Jesus Christ; it must be by the grace and mercy of God. Apart from that I have no hope. "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off." How did you find that out? Saul of Tarsus was a learned man and a very industrious man; but with all his learning and industry he had never found out what he was as a sinner; he had never found out that he was cut off from God, and that Christ alone could unite him to God: that "Christ died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." But when God set in and showed Saul of Tarsus that as a sinner he was cut off, Ah, he said, I have been joining with them that cutoff the Messiah, the only Person who can unite us to God, who can bring us eternal life, give us an inheritance, and be our portion forever. So, then, happy the people that have thus found out their condition, that know something of this noise, of this shaking, of this unity of the faith, and are longing for the Holy Ghost to concentrate upon their souls the blessings of which I have spoken; they may thus take a defiant position, and feel that as Jesus has conquered, and God is on their side, they must therefore be more than conquerors through him that loved them.

Now what becomes of these people? Not one of these bones (so they were not Wesleyans, you see, in doctrine, at any rate) was lost. Towards the end of this 37th of Ezekiel it is said of these selfsame people, "They shall inherit the land forever." So says Peter, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." "And David my servant," meaning Jesus Christ, "shall be king over them; and I will place my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." So, you have a land forever, a

king forever, and God's presence forever. The Lord says in the 39th of Ezekiel last verse, of the same people, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them." So, by Jesus Christ God is come to dwell with us, and he will never go away again; Jesus has led captivity captive, ascended up on high, received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. And the Lord said, "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with, them; and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; yes, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen" that is, the Gentiles, "shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore." The Lord revealed to Peter a very repulsive scene; wild beasts, four-footed beasts, reptiles, creeping things, fowls of the air; "Arise, Peter; slay, and eat." Not so, Lord, it is the worst lot I ever saw. Oh no, it is not, Peter, not the worst you ever saw; you never saw their real condition so before; it is only a picture of yourself by nature. "What God has cleansed, that call not you common." So, there is the prediction that when Christ should come and establish the eternal dwelling of God with men, then should the Gentiles learn the delightful truth that the Lord does sanctify Israel. And how does he do it? First, by election, setting them apart, and giving them to Christ; blessing them with all spiritual blessings; "sanctified by God the Father;" that is, done sovereignly. Secondly, he does so legally. "Jesus Christ, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." Thirdly, by regeneration, as we have shown this morning, bringing them to a knowledge of himself. Fourthly, he does so by resurrection; for what is the resurrection but the completing of our sanctification, the completing of the getting rid of the beggarly elements of corruption, mortality, degradation, and weakness? "They shall know that I the Lord do thus sanctify Israel." This sweetly accords with the language of one who said, "All my springs are in you, the Lord."

I now notice *the order of this praise*. "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." You that are made conscious that you are as a dry bone, that you are by nature without hope, that you are cut off, and that you can have life only as the gift of God by Jesus Christ, that you can have hope only by Jesus Christ, and that you can be heirs of God only by Jesus Christ, let such praise the Lord. Now this Psalm sets forth the order in which they are to praise the Lord. "Praise God in his sanctuary." The sanctuary there of course refers to the temple; and the temple presents to us the sacrificial service, and that sacrificial service presents to us the substitutional work of Christ, the fire descended upon the sacrifice, and the people escaped. Therefore, the doctrine here implied by praising the Lord in his sanctuary is that of reconciliation to God by the non-imputation of sin to us, by our sins being blotted out; for he says, "I even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." The sanctuary, therefore, spiritually, and mystically, means the Lord Jesus Christ; and, says the apostle, "Thanks be to God, that always causes us to triumph in Christ." We can praise him there; that is the place to praise him, in Christ, where God has everything for us, and where he has nothing against us. It is a sweet thing to live there, a blessed thing to die there: we cannot be too familiar with this anti-typical sanctuary, where "mercy over the guilty reigns" and where we can praise the Lord for this wonderful revelation of his eternal mercy and glory, Secondly, you are to "praise him in the firmament of his power;" for what would the sanctuary be if it were not followed up with power to keep us in that reconciliation? "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before you; and shall say, Destroy them." So, then let us praise him in the firmament of his power. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Then, thirdly, we are to "praise him for his mighty acts;" I will here name only two mighty acts one bringing the Israelites

out of Egypt; the other, overturning Pharaoh and his host. And these two mighty acts typify two mighty acts wrought by the omnipotent arm of the Savior. At Calvary he wrought eternal salvation, at Calvary he destroyed all our sins; that was a mighty act that delivered us; that was a mighty act that destroyed all our sins. And as not an Egyptian was left alive, that is, not one of those that pursued the Israelites. so, not one sin has any legal life, or right, or power in it; all is dead; and so, as you stand in Christ, reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin. And then you are to praise him for something else; you are to go on from step to step; not to leave the reconciliation behind, not to leave the power behind, his eternal power, not to leave his mighty acts behind; but go on praising him. taking all these with you; never mind if your song has as many verses as the 119th Psalm. 176, verse after verse, verse after verse, take it all with you; you will have plenty of time to go through the whole when you get into a brighter and better world. Then you are to “praise him according to his excellent greatness.” I will tell you what I think his excellent greatness is, and how I came to think so. I think his greatness is excellent because it is the greatness of love. “How excellent is your lovingkindness, O God!” This is excellent greatness. You know there are some great, swelling mortals, great men: but then it is not excellent greatness. Real greatness is based upon humility, upon love, and upon doing good. Now the excellency of Gods greatness is that it is the greatness of lovingkindness. Oh, what an excellent greatness was that which sent such a Savior; what an excellent greatness was it in Jesus giving himself in the greatness of his love to die for us; what an excellent greatness was that that found us out in our low estate, and what an excellent greatness is that when it is said that “God is love”! Then also we are to “praise him with the sound of the trumpet,” which I have no time to enlarge upon. Now the order of praise here closes in a way that exactly suits the hyper. I am a thorough out and out hyper, and always was, and always shall be. I am not ashamed to own that my salvation originated with the Most High, that my salvation was wrought by the Most High, and that it was by the sovereign pleasure of the Most High that I was brought to know his name.