

## **Like Father, Like Son**

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Psalter: 422:5–6

Scripture: John 1:1–14

Psalter: 403

Sermon Text: John 1:12–13

Psalter: 278:1, 4, 5

Psalter: 407

*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

—John 1:12–13

There are two ways of becoming part of a family. Some children enter our lives through birth. What an amazing thing God does every time a new baby is conceived! I was so excited when I learned that my wife was pregnant with our first child. And I was very nervous when the day came for him to be born! Childbirth is hard on a mother and can be dangerous, but it is so rewarding to see a tiny newborn with his little hands and feet.

As each of our children grew, my wife and I recognized more and more of our images in each—in the shape of their eyes, the sound of their laugh, and the expressions of their personalities. They are like living reflections of us, and yet each one is unique.

The other way of becoming part of a family is by adoption. Just as birth may be full of wonder and joy, so adoption can be an amazing display of grace. Adoption is a free choice to bring a child into your home and your heart. It can be costly in home study fees, legal fees, and transportation costs, especially when adoption crosses

ethnic or national boundaries to bring together people from different backgrounds. It is amazing to see fathers and mothers adopt children to love and nurture as their own. In many cases, they adopt orphans who have lost parents either through circumstances or sinful choices. Such children had no claim on the new parents, but once adopted, they share equal rights, equal love, and equal responsibilities in the family. They may come with disabilities or sorrows, but once they become part of the family, their sorrows and joys mingle with those of all.

Each of us became a part of our family either by birth or by adoption, and each means of entering the family has its particular glory. One of the marvels of God's grace is that when God brings someone into His family, He does so both by birth and by adoption. In this way, He makes salvation a truly glorious work, for God grants His elect both divine birth and divine adoption.

John 1:12–13 teaches that *Christ grants divine adoption to all who receive Him because of divine birth*. The Son of God gives the right to be God's children to everyone who trusts Him with the faith created by God's regenerating work. At the beginning of his Gospel, John reveals to us two of the most glorious truths of our salvation and ties them together in Christ. Verse 12 focuses on *divine adoption*, the gracious grant of our Lord Jesus Christ to those who receive Him by faith. This relates to a new status granted to men. Verse 13 focuses on *divine birth*, the supernatural work of God by which fallen people receive Christ by faith. This pertains to a new nature created in men. Divine birth and divine adoption result in divine likeness—like Father, like son. So, I have three points to bring you under this theme of *Like Father, Like Son*: first, gracious adoption; second, supernatural rebirth; and third, amazing likeness.

### **The Gracious Adoption of God's Children**

John 1:12 says, according to a literal translation from the

Greek text, “But as many as received Him, He gave them authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” This verse is about a distinct group in the world, the people of God. They are a contrast to the world in general and even to the majority of the chosen nation of Israel. The text does not present individuals in isolation, but as a group unified by a shared spiritual condition: notice the plurals *them* and *those* and, in verse 14, *we*. So this group stands apart from the world but stands together as the family of God. Scripture describes this people first by their right response to Christ, and second by the great benefit given to them by Christ.

### *God’s People Have Received Christ by Faith*

John 1:12 says this people “received him.” The word *receive* is a common word in Greek and has no unusual significance. The key to understanding what it means is to recognize that God’s people receive a specific Person who offers Himself to us in a specific capacity. The text further explains these people are “those who believe in his name.” To believe is to trust. In the Bible, the name of the Lord is not just a label but God’s revelation of who He is. God is His name. Once we see who He is, we begin to understand what it means to trust Him. We may trust someone as our spouse, as our father, or as our accountant; but of Christ this is much more profoundly true: we trust Him according to His names, titles, works, and especially His offices.

Do you believably receive Jesus Christ as your chief Prophet to teach you His way of salvation? Do you believably embrace Jesus Christ as your only High Priest to sacrifice Himself for you and to intercede for and bless you? Do you believably give allegiance to Jesus Christ as your King to govern, defend, and preserve you by His Word and Spirit? Only if you can humbly answer “Yes, by the grace of God I have received Jesus Christ as being all this for *me*” have you truly received Christ.

No aspect of the doctrine of conversion is so misunderstood today as what it means to receive Christ. Millions of people think that to receive Christ means to say a prayer asking Him to come into your heart. That is a distortion of biblical evangelism. The great tragedy is that many people have prayed such a prayer while still trusting in their own wisdom to guide them, or their own good works to make them righteous, or their own power to run their lives. They have asked Jesus into their hearts, but never trusted Him as the Christ! Their lives show their shallow commitment to holiness and the church as well as their self-righteous legalism.

Sometimes a little child gets confused in a superstore or even at church about where her father is. Recently, one of my seminary colleague's daughters, looking for a familiar form at our church, raced to me and threw her arms around my leg. But when she looked up, she soon realized I was not her father, and slunk away. That was an embarrassing and frightening experience for her. But more tragic is the person who thinks that he has gotten hold of salvation only to find that he has not thrown his arms around the real Christ. What shame and horror he will experience on Judgment Day, when God reveals that he has trusted in religious rituals, emotional experiences, or self-help schemes. He will see that his "easy-believism" was a fatal delusion. What will he say when his pretense of being a Christian falls away, and the fires of hell open at his feet to imprison him forever?

Oh, make sure to receive the true Christ! Only in receiving Christ do we become part of the family of God.

#### *Christ Grants Adoption to God's People*

John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name." Here the word power signifies a right or authority; Christ extends to all believers the right and honor to be God's children and His brethren. Scripture

calls this “the adoption of children” (Eph. 1:5). The benefits of trusting in Christ are many. They include justification and sanctification, of course, but also assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, an increase of grace, and perseverance to the end. Yet, of all these benefits, the Holy Spirit singles out adoption for mention in verse 12, as if adoption encompassed them all. So Stephen Marshall (c. 1594–1655) wrote, “Very frequently in the Scriptures all the believers do obtain from Christ in this world and the world to come, here and to eternity, all is comprehended in this one, that they are made the children of God.”

Let us consider what this Scripture teaches us about this precious gift from God.

(1) Adoption is *the gracious grant of a new status before God*. Adoption is a gift, our text tells us, for “he gave them authority to become children of God.” As such, it is a free gift, not a commodity we can purchase, or a reward for our hard work. Samuel Willard (1640–1707) wrote, “He doth not adopt us, because we were lovely, but that we might be so. God saw as much beauty in others as in us, and that was none at all. And hence, that yet he should adopt us, is a demonstration of his inconceivable grace.”

By adoption, God grants us a new status. When we read “to them gave he power,” we should understand that the Greek word for power specifically refers to legal right or authority. Do not be confused and think that Christ gives people the ability to save themselves and make themselves into God’s children. John is not referring to the ability or strength to do something; he is speaking of a right or authorization. Calvin thus said adoption is not the gift of the power to believe, but Christ’s gift to those who already believe.

John does not say that adoption by God brings no new abilities with it—it certainly does, for our adoption is sealed with “the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5, 6). But adoption is first of

all a new legal status and relationship with God. When a husband and wife adopt a child, that adoption does not consist in providing, nurturing, educating, or disciplining him. Rather, it is the legal transaction granting him a new status as a member of the family.

It is critical that we see adoption as granting a *new* status. Many people today erroneously believe that all human beings are children of God. Protestant liberalism teaches that God is the Father of all, and all are His children. Indeed, human beings are God's offspring in the sense that they were created by Him (Acts 17:24–28). But long ago, by sin and unbelief, fallen humans cut themselves off from their Creator and from His household of faith. Thus Jesus says in John 8:42 and 44, “If God were your Father, ye would love me.... Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”

We also read in 1 John 3:10, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” This refers not to a small minority of people in the world but to the entire world apart from those saved by Christ. So 1 John 5:19 says, “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” We are not born into this world as children of God but as children of the devil, the evil one.

John 1:12 says, “But as many as received him, he gave them authority to *become* children of God.” They do not simply realize that they have always been children of God. No, they *become* children of God—with a new status and a new relation with God—only by grace.

(2) More specifically, adoption grants us the status of *being accounted the sons and heirs of God*. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 34) says, “Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.” To appreciate the richness of our adoption, we must realize that adoption is not the same thing as

justification. Justification too is the gift of a new legal status. Our sin was imputed, or counted to Christ on the cross, and His righteousness is counted to us by faith (Rom. 3:21–4:8; 2 Cor. 5:21). Justification gives us legal righteousness under God's justice.

Adoption goes even further, however. It establishes a legal relation between us and God, so that He is our Father and we are His children. Adoption is a legal and binding covenant of sonship between God and His people. This status was foreshadowed in God's covenant with Israel (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1), then in God's covenant with David, when the Lord said, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. 7:14). So Christ says of every believer, "I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:7). Thus the central promise of the covenant, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," reaches its highest point in adoption, in which the people of God are counted as sons and daughters of God with the right to count Him as their Father (Ps. 87:5, 6; 2 Cor. 6:18). Just as adoptive parents give their name to their adopted child signaling that he is now part of their family, so the Lord puts His name upon us to mark us as His own (Jer. 14:9; Rev. 3:12).

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) said, "From being a child of the devil to becoming a child of God, from being a child of wrath to becoming the object of God's favor, from being a child of condemnation to becoming an heir of all the promises and a possessor of all blessings, and to be exalted from the greatest misery to the highest felicity—this is something which exceeds all comprehension and all adoration."

(3) Adoption is *a gift from our Lord Jesus Christ*. When John 1:12 says, "He gave them authority to become children of God," it clearly refers to Christ as the incarnate Word. This may strike you as strange, for we normally speak of God the Father adopting us (Eph. 1:3–5; 1 John 3:1). In this, as in all things, Christ is

doing the will of the Father (John 4:34). The Father has chosen us for adoption as His children, but it is the Son who confers this gift. What a sweet thought it is to know that the Lord Jesus personally hands us our adoption papers! Augustine (354–430) observed that typically the only child of a father rejoices that he does not have to share his inheritance with anyone else. But Christ is an only Son who gladly shares His inheritance with us as His adopted brothers, takes us as His inheritance, and makes Himself ours!

Moreover, Christ is the one who confers adoption on us because He purchased it for us with His blood. Human adoption can be very expensive, especially if it involves adopting from a foreign country. Such a process can cost \$20,000 to \$30,000. Yet it was far more costly for Christ to secure our adoption: He had to descend from heaven to earth, humbling Himself to be “made of a woman, made under the law” (Phil. 2:5–8, Gal. 4:4). He redeemed us by dying under the curse of God (Gal. 3:13; 4:5). John 11:52 indicates that Christ died to “gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” Why are we, people of many nations, gathered into God’s family? Because Christ died for us.

James Boice said that our adoption, as authorized by Christ, should give us boldness and great confidence. The same Lord Jesus who has all authority in heaven and on earth has given us authority to be the children of God. Therefore, believers have the sovereign right to claim God as their Father. Our adoption stands on the highest possible legal ground and is rooted in the greatest moral and governmental authority.

Boice told how, on one of Napoleon’s military campaigns, the Emperor let go of the reins of his horse to read something. The horse reared up. Before it could throw Napoleon off, however, a lowly corporal ran up, seized the horse’s bridle, and brought it under control. Napoleon looked at the corporal and said, “Thank you, *Captain*.”

The newly promoted soldier said, “Of what company, sir?” The emperor replied, “Of my guards.” Immediately, the man laid down his musket, ripped off his corporal stripes, and walked to the army’s headquarters.

A staff person asked him what he was doing. “I am a captain of the guards,” he answered.

“By whose authority?” a man asked.

“By the authority of the Emperor,” said the new captain—and that settled the matter!

Dear believers in Jesus Christ, you are children of the living God. If anyone—angel, devil or man—asks by whose authority you claim to be a child of God, you may respond, “By the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

How amazing it is that God would adopt His bitter enemies, children of the devil, into His own family! We should marvel at the words of 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” And we should be awestruck at the thought that God confers this gift on us by the nail-pierced hand of His Son!

### **The Supernatural Birth of God’s Children**

Thus far, we have considered the gracious adoption of God’s children in Christ. In John 1:12, we saw that God’s people receive Christ by faith and are granted adoption by Christ. This brings us to the second half of our Scripture text. John 1:12 ends in the Greek with the phrase “to them that believe in his name.” Such persons are further described in John 1:13, literally translated, as those “who not of bloods nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of a man but of God were born.”

This verse answers a very important question: How can anyone receive Christ? How can anyone believe in Him? People tend to think that receiving Christ is easy; but John told us in verses 10–11 that the world did not know or recognize Christ, and Israel did not receive Him. There is a universal resistance in mankind against faith

in Christ. As the true Light, Christ has come into the world, but men will not come to this Light, for they hate it and love the darkness instead, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19, 20).

Who then can be saved? Matthew 19:25–26 tells us that God must do a supernatural work to convert us. It is so much a work of new creation that the Bible calls it regeneration, or being born again (John 1:13; 3:3–8; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). Literally, it is a “genesis from above” (John 3:6). Our Lord Jesus declares, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

The first three parts of John 1:13 emphatically deny that this spiritual rebirth is produced by man. The fourth part, by contrast, affirms that it is a miracle of God.

#### *Regeneration is Not a Birth by Any Human Means*

John says that God’s believing children have been born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.” Some commentators say these three phrases say the same thing in three different ways: that this rebirth is not a physical birth. But that does not fully explain the meaning of the text. The three phrases refer to three distinct matters: our physical birth, our personal choices, and the choices of our forbears or leaders. Specifically, it means the following:

(1) We are not born into the kingdom of God *by physical birth*. It is not a matter of biology or genealogy. “Blood” refers to the bodily fluids involved in conception, pregnancy, and natural birth, or possibly to the bloodlines of ancestry. You are not born a Christian. No individual or group can be considered Christian by virtue of family or ethnicity. That was a crucial statement for John to make in view of Jewish national pride, but he does not end there. Whenever a particular people generally embrace the Christian faith, they might assume that their race or nation is God’s chosen people, but God’s elect were never

defined by race, says Romans 9:6–13. Since the coming of Christ, the family of God has expanded into every nation (Matt. 28:19). Family or national pride and racism have no place in biblical Christianity. No one will get to heaven based on the color of his skin, his ethnic heritage, or the correct last name.

(2) We are not born into the kingdom *by our will*, or, in the words of our Scripture, “nor of the will of the flesh.” Some scholars say “the will of the flesh” refers to sexual desire. “Flesh” can sometimes refer to the physical body, and “the will of the flesh” can refer to physical desires. If that is the meaning here, this phrase would repeat what was said before, that we are not born again by a physical birth. John’s choice of words suggests that he refers here not to the human body, but to the desires and choices of the fallen human heart.

This is confirmed by the Bible’s use of *flesh*. So John 1:14 tells us, “the Word was made flesh”—not just a body, but a fully human person with body and soul. When the Lord Jesus contrasts flesh and spirit in John 3:6 and 6:63, He is not drawing a contrast between the human body and the human spirit, but between man’s inability and the supernatural power of God the Holy Ghost. In John 8:15, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for judging after the flesh, not because they were looking at people’s bodies, but because they were thinking in a limited human manner. And in John 17:2, Christ prayed to His Father to give His Son “power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” Christ did not merely have sovereignty over human bodies, but sovereignty over all humanity, body and soul, to save His elect. So *flesh* often refers to human nature, body and soul together, in a way that emphasizes our weakness due to the Fall.

Therefore, when John says, “not of the will of the flesh,” he means that our spiritual birth is not produced by human will, human choices, human motivations, or the inclinations of human nature, for we are radically

corrupted by sin. Jesus taught this in John 5:40, saying, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” Literally, He is saying, “You are not willing to come to me.” People by nature are *unwilling* to trust in Christ. They are also *unable* to come to Christ. In John 6:44, Christ says, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” They cannot even truly hear His Word (John 8:43). People must be born again to receive Christ because, in their fallen condition, they are unwilling and unable to trust Him. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, “We are so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God” (Q. 8).

This should humble us. You cannot receive Christ by an act of your own will. Your duty is to come to Christ because you have a will and you are responsible to use it rightly, but our fallen human nature is so twisted by sin that we will not and cannot trust Christ. Do you say to yourself, “I can receive the Lord Jesus whenever I please”? You cannot take one step toward Him without the supernatural grace of God. You are so wicked, so depraved, and so hostile to God that you will never be willing or able to come to Christ unless God works a miracle in your heart. We are not born into the kingdom by our own will.

(3) We are born into the kingdom *not by the will of any other human being*, says John 1:12, “nor of the will of man.” There are two words for “man” in Greek. One is more generic, *anthropos*, meaning a human being. The other word, *andros*, is gender-specific, referring to an adult male human being, and that is the word used here. Some people think “the will of a man” refers to the choice of an adult male to beget offspring. In that case, this is just another reference to physical birth, and all three phrases have essentially the same meaning.

Again, I do not believe this interpretation is adequate because it does not square with the biblical view of God’s

sovereignty over conception and birth. The Bible repeatedly gives us examples of husbands who wanted to have children, but nothing happened until the Lord opened the wombs of their wives. Any couple who has struggled with infertility understands this well. Children are not conceived and born “of the will of a man” but by the will of God. So it seems unlikely that John would refer to natural birth as “of the will of a man” because even natural conception and birth are not under man’s control.

On the other hand, I do not agree with those who collapse this phrase into the one before it as if “not by the will of a man” is another way of saying not by “the will of the flesh.” That does not do justice to the gender-specific nuance of this word for man.

It seems best to understand that John is saying that not only your will is unable to regenerate you, but also no “father figure” in your life can do it for you by his will. The Jews would have understood this as a reference to circumcision, so this text is very important in John’s evangelization of his fellow Jews. The Jews might say, “Of course no one is part of the kingdom just by birth. Our fathers circumcised us into the covenant with Abraham. Circumcision made us sons of the kingdom.” To this John responds, “Not by the will of a man.” Today someone might say, “I know I am a Christian because my parents had me baptized.” To this Scripture responds, “Not by the will of a man.” No parent’s decision can save his children.

John Gill wrote, “The best of men, as Abraham, David, and others; who though ever so willing and desirous that their children, relations, friends, and servants should be born again, be partakers of the grace of God, and live in his sight, yet cannot effect any thing of this kind: all that they can do for them is to pray for them, give advice, and bring them under the means of grace; but all is ineffectual without a divine energy.” Only the Word and the Spirit can save us.

This is a warning to parents. We long to see our children saved. It would be so easy to grasp hold of something that would guarantee that our children go to heaven. Isn't that why some parents are so eager for their children to pray the sinner's prayer? How many of us are relying on infant baptism or Christian education, to save our little ones? But beware, dear parents. As we already saw in John 1:12, no prayer, no sacrament, and no amount of education can make your child a child of God. They only are saved who embrace Christ and His benefits with a believing heart. You cannot make your child believe. No minister can save him, and no conference, or retreat, or school can guarantee his conversion. Evangelize these children, yes, with all diligence. Pray fervently for their salvation, and then wait humbly on the Lord. Only He, the faithful covenant-keeping God, can save them.

This brings us to the last part of our text's description of the new birth.

*Regeneration Is an Act of the Sovereign Will of God*

John 1:13 declares that Christ-receiving, gospel-believing children of God, "are born of God." The essence of the gospel is that "salvation belongeth unto the LORD" (Ps. 3:8). If men are to be saved, God must do the saving. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). We must trust in the power and grace of God, who works the miracle of regeneration in His chosen ones. To be born again is to be born of God.

In his heart, every Christian knows that he is saved only because of the grace of God. From beginning to end, it is all of God. Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) wrote,

I remember sitting one day in the House of God and hearing a sermon as dry as possible and as worthless as all such sermons are, when a thought struck my mind—how came I to be converted? I prayed, thought I. Then I thought, how came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came

I to read the Scriptures? Why did I read them and what led me to them? And then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of all and that He was the Author of faith!

Concerning this rebirth, or birth from above, we may say that:

(1) It is *a birth from God the Father*. John 1:12–13 says that the “children of God” have been born “of God.” Through this passage, God the Father is distinguished from His only begotten Son. The believer’s rebirth is particularly attributed to God the Father. The First Epistle of John repeatedly speaks of being “born of God the Father” (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). This might surprise you since Christ also speaks of being born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8). The Holy Spirit is the effective agent of the second birth, but Scripture locates the source of our rebirth in the will of God the Father, who works through the Son and by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3–7). James 1:17–18 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” Notice that we are begotten, not of our will, but of the Father’s will. So 1 Peter 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

God extends His fatherly love to us even before He adopts us as His children. This reminds us that our adoption is entirely of God’s initiative. It is rooted in “His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began” (2 Tim. 1:9). The Spirit freely and sovereignly effects the new birth because the Father chose us for this very thing in eternity past (Eph. 1:3–5; 1 Pet. 1:1–2). We were not yet His children at that time, but He had already set His predestinating

and adoptive love upon us and, in His time, brought our adoption to fruition.

Do you know the love of the Father? Have you been born again? If so, your rebirth was the effect of His glorious, eternal, fatherly love for you. How personal is the Father's love for you, that He would bring you out of spiritual death and raise you with Christ into spiritual life (Eph. 2:4–5)! If He chose you and loved you and regenerated you, what good things does He yet have in store for you? Exult in the love of the Father; your regeneration is a birth from God the Father.

(2) It is *a birth of God's initiative and power alone*. Surely this is part of what Scripture means when it says God's people "were born...of God." The verb is passive, indicating that God's people did not birth themselves. God did it to them.

The entire metaphor of birth takes the power and initiative out of our hands and puts it in God's. God brought us to birth, and we only realized it afterwards as we experienced our conversion from unbelief to faith in Christ. This birth was not of our will, but of God's will.

Our Lord expressed the same truth when He taught Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit. Jesus said human flesh cannot produce this birth; only the Spirit of God can do that. Then, in John 3:8, Jesus compared the Spirit to the wind. Using the words for Spirit and wind, which are the same in Greek, Jesus said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." You cannot control the wind any more than you can control how the heavenly Father breathes upon dead sinners by His Spirit.

(3) It is *a birth of a new nature in Christ*. The word for birth implies the arrival of a new person into the world. J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) wrote,

The birth here spoken of is the new birth, or regeneration, that complete change of heart and nature which takes place in a man when he becomes a real Christian. It is a change so great that no other figure but that of birth can fully express it. It is as when a new being, with new appetites, wants, and desires is brought into the world. A person born of God is ‘a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Fallen human nature is diametrically opposed to God. This rebirth of God is a revolution in the heart, overthrowing natural enmity and opening the way for the truth of the gospel. It is the birth of a new nature, the conquest of a rebellious soul, and the dethroning of sin as our master. Sin still remains like an enemy hiding in the mountains, waging guerrilla warfare against our souls (1 Pet. 2:11). If we are not watchful, sin can launch devastating attacks upon us; but the King of Kings has asserted His crown rights over us, and has established His throne in our hearts.

The birth of the new nature is our re-creation in the image of God. This too is clearly implied in John 1. If God the Father begets us in a new spiritual birth, doesn’t that imply that He makes us like Himself? Like father, like son, as the saying goes. Natural begetting and birth produces a child in the image of his parents (Gen. 5:3). By analogy, we expect the same to be true of spiritual begetting and birth. If you are born of God, then you bear the image of the Father, in and through Christ.

### **Putting It Together: Divine Birth unto Divine Adoption unto Divine Likeness**

*Christ grants divine adoption to all who receive Him because of their divine birth.* How wise and good God is! He has given us two gifts that reach us in our great need and lift us into the heavens: divine adoption and divine birth. By sin, our status is doomed and our nature ruined.

But, by divine adoption, God changes our status from disgraced sons of hell to honored children of heaven. He gives us a status above the angels, changing our natures from hateful children of Satan to holy children of God.

God has given us these distinct blessings in one inseparable package, for they come to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. In a sense, God's elect are “in Christ” before the world was created (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9). There is a covenantal union between Christ and His elect from all eternity. Within that covenantal union, Christ died in their place. He intercedes for them, obtains the Spirit of regeneration for them, and writes His Word on their hearts with the Holy Spirit as promised in the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:1–6).

The regenerated soul receives Christ by faith, and the covenantal union then becomes a vital, spiritual union through faith. Paul thus speaks in Romans 16:7 of other Christians who “were in Christ before me.” In our conversion, we become united to Christ in a new, living manner. The Spirit of Christ dwells in us and we belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). Christ Himself dwells in us (Col. 1:27) and does so in increasing measure as the Father strengthens our faith by His Spirit (Eph. 3:16–17). United to the Son of God, we are adopted as God's sons and daughters and grow more and more into the image of Christ so that He may be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). In and through Christ and His work by His Spirit, we then become increasingly like our Father in heaven.

Through adoption, our Father grants us likeness to Himself. He imparts to us a filial heart and disposition that resembles His own. The Puritan Roger Drake writes, “All God's adopted children bear their Father's image, as Gideon's brethren did his (Judg. 8:18). They are like God, in holiness [and] in dignity” (Matt. 5:44–45; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:7; 1 John 3:2–3).

“Like Father, like son” is true in another sense, too. As God's children, we have been born in our Father's

likeness. Yet we have also been born in the likeness of His Son by a living union with that Son. By grace, we increasingly become like them both. Witsius wrote that as those “born of God...the sons of God by grace bear some resemblance to him who is the Son of God by nature.... We are even transformed into his likeness, and have upon us no contemptible effulgence [or brilliant shining forth] of his most glorious holiness.”

### **Concluding Applications and Questions**

The privilege of being made like the Father through adoption places believers under responsibilities to our adopting Father that ought to transform the way we think and live. Let me just mention four of these responsibilities, and then conclude with some questions of self-examination.

(1) *Obey and imitate your Father, and love His image-bearers.* Strive to be like Him, to be holy as He is holy, to be loving as He is loving. We are to be “imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1) to show that we bear the family likeness.

We are, then, to love the Father’s image wherever we see it. We are to live as God’s children in mutual love and patience with each other, having the same Father, Elder Brother, and indwelling Spirit.

(2) *Show childlike reverence and love for your Father in everything.* Reflect habitually upon your Father’s great glory and majesty. Stand in awe of Him; render Him praise and thanksgiving in all things. Let overflowing love to your Father constrain you to employ all the means of grace, to obey His commands, and to work for Him.

(3) *Submit to your Father in every providence.* When He visits you with the rod, don’t resist or murmur. Don’t immediately respond by saying, “I am not a child of God, God is not my Father, God deals harshly with me; if He were my Father, He would have compassion on me; He

would then deliver me from this grievous and especially this sinful cross’—to speak thus does not befit the nature of an upright child,” writes Brakel. Rather, “it is fitting for a child to be quiet, to humbly submit, and to say, ‘I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him’” (Micah 7:9).

(4) *Rejoice in being in your Father’s presence and resist every hindrance that keeps you from relishing your Father’s adopting grace.* Delight in communing with Him and avoid all murmuring against Him. In heaven, this joy will be full; our adoption will then be perfected (Rom. 8:23). We will enter into the Father’s presence where we will be everlastinglly enjoying, delighting, and praising God. Let us wait and long for that, as children who eagerly anticipate our full inheritance, where the triune God shall be our all in all.

Ask yourself, then, these questions:

(1) Have I received Jesus Christ as my Prophet, Priest, and King? If so, continue to live by faith in Him alone. Colossians 2:6 says, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” You will never grow beyond Christ but only deeper into Him.

(2) Have I been adopted by God as one of His dear children? Then live as a child of God, and not as an orphan. When trouble comes, lift your eyes to your heavenly Father. Be continually amazed at God’s kindness to you in adopting you as His child.

(3) Have I been born of God to become a child of God? If so, walk by the Spirit in a new and godly life. Romans 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.”

(4) Ask, am I counted among the children of God? Then count them as your brothers and sisters, and love them affectionately and patiently. Be a committed and faithful church member. Care for the saints. Hear the words

of Jesus calling to His family at the foot of His cross, "Woman, behold thy son!" and "Behold thy mother!" (John 19:26–27). Look around your church at the older men and say, "These are my fathers." View the older women and say, "These are my mothers." Say of the younger men, "These are my brothers," and of the younger women, "These are my sisters in all purity" (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1–2).

(5) Ask yourself, am I yet lost? Are these glorious truths not true of me as yet? Am I still separated from Christ, alienated from holy people of God, a stranger to the covenant of adoption, and dead in my sins? Then cry out to God for salvation until He makes you a child of God. You are presently far from God, but Christ can bring you near by His blood. Refuse to rest upon anything of yourself and to find any peace anywhere except with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And may God cause you to be born again unto a living hope in Christ. May Christ grant you the right to be a child of God, even today!

(6) Ask, am I truly saved and becoming increasingly like my Father in heaven? If so, then sing! If there is any right response to John 1:12–13, surely it is praise and thanksgiving and the lifting up of our hearts to the Lord. In the great congregation of God's people, at home with your loved ones, or alone with God, sing praise to Him with grace in your heart:

O how shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which Thou to me hast showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God;  
Should know, should feel my sins forgiv'n,  
And taste today the joys of heav'n. Amen.

# **Christ's Prophecy Regarding the Last Day**

*Rev. Bartel Elshout*

Psalter 20

Scripture: Matthew 7:13–29

Psalter 265

Sermon Text: Matthew 7:21–23

Psalter 206:2, 3, 5

Psalter 384:1, 2, 4, 5

Boys and girls, have you ever looked at an x-ray? Perhaps at some point in your life, you broke an arm or a leg, and the doctor showed you on the x-ray what you cannot see with your naked eye, providing evidence that your arm or leg was indeed broken. How very thankful we ought to be for technology that enables us to see beneath the skin so that physicians can diagnose and treat our illnesses!

When it comes to the state of our soul, however, there is no technology that can expose what really transpires in the heart of a man. Only One knows perfectly what lives in our hearts. To Him all things are open and naked, and He knows the inner recesses of our hearts—and thus the true state of our hearts. Simply stated, this means that when God looks upon us, He is always looking at a spiritual x-ray of our lives. He always x-rays our existence. He x-rays our heart, our motives, and our deeds.

Beloved congregation, what would a spiritual x-ray of our hearts reveal? You will recognize that this is a very important question for all of us, for a day is coming when our hearts will be judged by the Judge of all the earth. And when that day arrives, our religion must be genuine!

This truth prompted the Lord Jesus Christ to conclude one of the most remarkable sermons ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount, with an urgent, powerful, four-fold call to self-examination. With God's help, we want to consider one of these calls to self-examination. Our text for this occasion can therefore be found in Matthew 7:21–23: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

This passage speaks to us of Christ's prophecy regarding the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. We will make the following observations:

First, we find in this passage a solemn assessment: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Second, it contains an urgent but futile plea: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?”

And, third, there is an irreversible pronouncement: “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

## 1. A Solemn Assessment

It is remarkable that Christ puts so much emphasis on self-examination at the conclusion of this sermon. We could argue that He even begins His sermon that way by formulating the well-known and heart-searching Beatitudes. These Beatitudes define who the citizens of His kingdom are. This is fitting when considering that the Sermon on the Mount is often referred to as the constitution of the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

Christ thus begins that sermon by telling us who the blessed ones are: they are the poor in spirit, who know

their spiritual poverty and spiritual bankruptcy, who begin to see themselves as God sees them. A pronouncement follows that they who mourn are blessed. They mourn over their spiritual poverty and thus over their sin. They grieve over it and are as mournful as someone who mourns the death of a loved one. Christ then declares, “Blessed are the meek”—that is, those who know their proper place of humble submission before God.

Christ is therefore saying that they are blessed who see themselves as God sees them, and who, as poor, needy, bankrupt sinners, hunger and thirst after Christ and His perfect righteousness—merited by His perfect life and perfect sacrifice—and who cannot be satisfied without Him and what He has accomplished.

Christ then proceeds to describe the external fruits of internal grace by saying, “Blessed are the merciful and the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Blessed are the peacemakers, “for they shall be called the children of God.” He concludes the Beatitudes by saying that they are blessed whose walk is such that the world will react in hostility and persecute them for righteousness’ sake. Christ, the Living Word and the Author of the written Word, has given us a perfect portrait of the citizens of His kingdom in this description.

Subsequently, He begins to unfold a variety of themes in the sermon proper and then ends it with a striking conclusion, calling all who hear His Word to engage in serious self-examination. He does so by first of all telling us that there is a broad as well as a narrow way, and that everyone is traveling on one of the two. We are either on the narrow way that leads to eternal life, or we are on the broad way traversed by so many—a way that inevitably will lead to everlasting perdition.

Christ follows this conclusion with the analogy of a tree—an analogy to which we can all relate. We all understand that a tree with apples on it cannot be a pear tree. It is an apple tree by virtue of its fruits. After this analogy,

we arrive at our text, which is followed by the Lord Jesus' concluding parable of the wise and foolish builders.

What are we to learn from the fact that Christ, the greatest of all preachers, puts so much emphasis on self-examination at the conclusion of this extraordinary sermon? It communicates to us that Christ recognized that men are always in danger of deceiving themselves when it comes to the spiritual state of their souls. This is precisely why He presses the danger of self-deceit home, for He is not preaching this sermon to Gentiles, but to sons and daughters of Abraham! He is preaching this sermon to men and women to whom the Word of God had been mercifully entrusted—men and women who were now following Him and hearing His words. He is calling hearers of His Word to engage in this serious self-examination.

Christ engages in what is referred to as discriminatory preaching—preaching that discriminates between true and counterfeit faith. He thereby exemplifies that the preaching of His servants today must also be discriminatory. The great Prophet of righteousness, the Living Word of God, tells His hearers that merely because they are hearing Him does not ensure entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

The words of our text are therefore striking and unsettling. These words make me tremble, and they are words that should also make you tremble because Christ says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Our entrance into His kingdom is not guaranteed by merely calling Him Lord, and by merely professing His name publicly. He purposely repeats the word "Lord" to emphasize that He is not referring to someone who is flippant about his profession, but rather, to someone who says, "Lord, Lord." The conclusion is inescapable: confessing the lordship of Jesus with our lips does not mean that we shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Christ is saying that a profession of His lordship without the confirmation of a life that re-

veals true subjection to His lordship is a profession of no value in God's sight.

I must therefore ask you, what sort of profession of the lordship of Christ are you making? Christ is telling us here that on that final day He will personally subject our profession to His examination. Take note that the One who prophesies here will be the Judge of all the earth who knows with perfection what will happen on that day. He is telling us here that on that day there will be many who will appear before Him with an empty profession of His Name. Such people will have submitted themselves verbally to His lordship, but the evidence or fruit of true subjection to Him will be lacking. It will be confirmed that they never were His true followers and disciples.

Christ evidently emphasized this fact because He knew better than any minister of the gospel ever could that the danger of self-deceit is great in the visible church as she gathers from Lord's Day to Lord's Day—a church filled with men and women who at least outwardly are professing His name. We all therefore need to ask ourselves the following questions: "Is our profession genuine? Do we love and serve the Lord whose Name we profess? Is there evidence in our lives that we have not only come to Christ as poor, needy sinners, but that we are also His obedient followers?" For the crucial truth Christ is emphasizing here is that union with Him will always result in likeness to Him. Coming to Christ and becoming like Christ are inseparably connected; consequently, when such likeness is consistently absent in our lives—when we profess one thing but the fruits of our lives reveal the opposite—then it must be concluded that a vital and saving union with Christ is lacking, for true saving faith will always produce the fruit of a godly life. James underscores this by saying that faith without works is dead (James 2:17–26).

Having said this, I recognize fully that these sobering words of Christ also make God's children tremble, for when they examine their own lives and consider all

their sinful failures and inconsistencies, the troubling question arises, "Lord, shall I yet prove to be an empty and fruitless professor of Thy Name?" They recognize that Christ will not at all be impressed on that great Day of Judgment with a striking conversion story, for a conversion that is not affirmed by a godly life, and thus by genuine Christ-likeness, will be of absolutely no value.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." The use of the present tense in the original Greek phrase, translated as "doeth the will of my Father," is significant here. Christ is referring to those who repeatedly, habitually, and continually are doers of His Father's will. Christ emphasizes that true believers who will enter the kingdom of Heaven are men and women whose habitual inclination is to live in obedience to the will of His Father.

Why does Christ wish to emphasize this point? It will become clear only when we recognize that it has everything to do with the purpose for which we were created. When God created Adam as a perfect and sinless human being, he was a doer of his Father's will. Adam was therefore a man whose natural inclination was to live in obedience to the will of his Maker. He loved his Maker and therefore also loved His will and precepts. The moment Adam fell, however, he became a doer of his own will. This is another way of saying that he became a sinner. Sin is the transgression of God's holy law; it is doing of our own will; it is doing what pleases ourselves. Natural man hates God and hates his neighbor because the natural heart is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law and neither, indeed, can be (Rom. 8:7).

What happens, however, when the Spirit of God performs the marvelous work of regeneration? He transforms a sinner into a new creation, and in so doing He also renews the will. The Spirit of God transforms a man from being an enemy of God and His law into a doer of

His will, and it consequently becomes his desire to do His Maker's revealed will.

Because of this new inclination, it is painful when the Spirit of God convicts us that we come short of the glory of God. What grief this causes in the souls of those in whose hearts the love of God has been shed abroad, and whose desire it has become to please God! Thus we conclude that regeneration transforms a sinner into a new creature. One of the clearest evidences of such a gracious transformation is that that sinner becomes a doer of the will of God.

We should also observe that Christ, in our text, specifically refers to the will of *His Father*. This is the first time, by the way, in the gospel of Matthew that Christ explicitly refers to this wonderful relationship that exists between Him and His Father. What then does Christ have in mind here when He defines godliness as a doing of the will of His Father?

Upon comparing Scripture with Scripture, it becomes clear that the will of the Father is as follows: It is the will of a Father who loves His eternal and only-begotten Son. Because of this infinite and eternal love for His Son, it is His will that His Son should be supremely honored in all things. If, then, it is the Father's supreme good pleasure to honor His beloved Son, what does the Father demand of us in terms of honoring His Son? We are to honor Him in two ways.

First, in 1 John 3:23, we read, "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." This text states plainly that it is the Father's will that we believe in the name of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is, however, also the Father's will that we should honor His Son, secondly, in the pathway of obedience. This obedience is spelled out for us in the written Word of God that testifies of the Living Word, the Father's beloved Son. When, by the grace of God, we honor the written

Word by ordering our steps according to that Word, we are honoring the Living Word. We therefore conclude that it is the revealed will of the Father that we believe on His Son and obey His Son; that is, as believers in His Son, we are to follow and honor Him in the pathway of obedience.

This is precisely the kind of obedience that the Spirit of God produces in the lives of all regenerated sinners. He will transform them into doers of the will of the Father. He will so work in a sinner's heart that he comes to realize that, as a wretched, lost, and guilty sinner, there is only one solution for his soul, found solely in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit's special work to make Christ precious to our souls; He becomes the altogether lovely One for those who know themselves to be altogether guilty and vile. He will make room for this precious Savior in the heart so that such a sinner cannot but take refuge to Him and touch the hem of His garment.

Such coming to Christ, however, will always result in a sinner's becoming like Christ. Not only are we called to come to Christ, but we are also called to become *like* Christ. Those who have been worked in by God's Spirit and come to Christ savingly will inevitably also become like Him. Those two fundamental activities of genuine spiritual life are inseparably connected. Where the one is, the other will always be.

As stated earlier, James articulates this by saying, "I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18). He also says that faith without works is dead. In what appears to be contradictory to what Paul says, James then says that Abraham and Rahab were justified by works. But James is not teaching that we can be justified before God on the basis of our works; what he means is that the obedience of Abraham and Rahab confirmed that their faith was just—that is, that their faith was genuine. To say it in more theological terms, their sanctification justified their justification; it proved that their faith was genuine. Only habitual sanctification will prove that our

faith is real and genuine. Christ underlined the same truth when He said, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20).

Oh, beloved congregation, though you recognize your imperfection and sinfulness, can you say that Christ has become the only Name under heaven whereby you must be saved? Can you say that you hunger and thirst after His righteousness, and can you also say that you desire to honor this Christ with an obedient life—not to merit salvation, but to love such a Savior who, because of His marvelous work of redemption, is so worthy that you should honor Him by an obedient life?

It is this believing in and obeying of the Son that constitutes doing the will of the Father. Since the Father loves His Son, it is His will that we should honor His Son who is also the living Word of God. It is such honoring of the Living Word by being a doer of the written Word that defines for us the true meaning of being a doer of the will of the Father.

For emphasis, let me repeat that Christ uses the present tense to describe the activity of the doers of His Father's will. As stated earlier, the use of the present tense in Greek means that Christ wants to make the point that true believers are a people who repeatedly and habitually do the will of His Father which is in heaven. And how can it be any different? A true Christian is united to Christ as a branch is grafted into the vine (John 15). When a fallen sinner is truly grafted into Christ by the Spirit of Christ, genuine spiritual life will flow into the vine and this spiritual branch will begin to bear fruit. Christ designates such fruit-bearing as the habitual doing of the will of His Father—not intermittently but habitually doing His will in every area of our lives.

That is the bottom line, for whoever is united to Christ will inevitably and unmistakably become like Christ. That living union between Christ and the believer will never fail

to bear fruit—and will never fail to produce people who, united to the Son of the Father, do the will of His Father.

This conclusion should not be interpreted to mean that the Lord Jesus is teaching that salvation is by works after all. Not at all! Rather, He is simply saying that the only thing that truly matters in the end is whether we have been doers of the will of our Father in heaven. Such doing of His will is the only biblically sanctioned evidence that our faith in Christ is genuine. It is a faith that will never fail to produce a sanctified life.

It is so important for us to keep in mind that these words come from the lips of the living Word Himself—from the lips of the Savior of sinners. They come from the lips of Him who will once judge the living and the dead. He is saying with utmost solemnity that the only thing that ultimately matters on the Day of Judgment is whether we have been doers of the will of His Father.

## **2. An Urgent but Futile Plea**

Christ goes on to say that there will be many who will say to Him in that day—the day when all men shall be summoned before the judgment seat of Christ—“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” We need to give special attention to the fact that He uses the phrase “in thy name” three times in this statement. There will be many who will come before Him saying, “But Lord, consider all that I have done—all the activity I have been engaged in, not for my name but for Thy Name.” The truth that really needs to sink in here is that many will say these words in utter astonishment. Because of all they have done in the name of Christ, they will fully expect to enter heaven. It will therefore be to their utter dismay that they discover that Christ will send them to hell instead.

Let me add parenthetically that Christ is not addressing the Scribes and Pharisees here. They never

acknowledged Him as Lord, nor did they ever do anything in His name. On the contrary, they hated Him with a bitter hatred and scorned the idea that He was the Son of God. It should therefore be rather obvious that Christ did not have them in mind at all. Instead, Christ is addressing people who publicly acknowledge His lordship and who have been actively engaged in doing things in His name. There will be many who will make that claim when they appear before Him in the Day of Judgment—not a few, but many!

I need to confess that these words have shaken me to the core of my being. It is painfully clear to me that the first category of people Jesus is referring to are those who have prophesied in His name—that is, those who have proclaimed His Word on His behalf. That means that He is referring here to ministers of the gospel. There will be many preachers who will say to Christ in that day, “But I have preached in Thy name all the days of my life.”

We need to understand that this preaching is indeed what the word “prophesied” means here. In Scripture, this word not only refers to the foretelling of the future, but it first and foremost refers to the proclamation of the Word of God. A prophet in Scripture was a proclaimers of God’s truth, and at times that also included the foretelling of the future. Christ is therefore saying that there will be many in that day who have spoken in His Name and who in utter astonishment will say, “Lord, how is this possible? How canst Thou tell me to depart from Thee when all the days of my life I have preached in Thy Name? How can this possibly be?”

What a day it will be when the books of remembrance will be opened and when everything will be unveiled! All pretense will be gone forever, and, as never before, all things will be opened and naked before the God with whom we have to do.

That day many will claim to have cast out devils in Christ’s name and to have done wonderful works in His

name. You see, Christ is addressing religious engagement that is not adorned by a life of genuine holiness. Christ is therefore saying to us, “If, along with all your religious activity and all the things you may have done in My name, you have not been a doer of the will of My Father—if all of your religious activity has not been adorned by genuine, habitual, and consistent godliness—it will all have been in vain.”

This declaration means that among those whom Christ will send to hell there will be many who have done work in God’s kingdom. This will include many ministers, elders, deacons, teachers, seminary professors, and respectable and active church members. They all have in common the belief that their religious engagement has been done in Christ’s Name.

Beloved, these are not my words! These are the words of the One who will be the Judge of all the earth in that day. These will be the words of One who knows with perfection what will transpire in that day. He was telling His audience, and He is telling us today, “Do not deceive yourself. Do not think that just because you are active in the church and profess to be doing all this in My Name, you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

You need to understand that in the final analysis it will not matter at all that I personally have been a minister of the gospel. It will not help me in that day that I have preached so many sermons if my ministry has also not been adorned by genuine godliness—evidence that there is a real, living, and fruit-bearing union between the Lord Jesus Christ and my soul. If I have not been a consistent doer of His Father’s will, it will cancel out all that I have done in His name.

Just before our text, the Lord Jesus said, “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” In other words, it is impossible to expect a thistle to bring forth edible fruit. It cannot do so—and neither would we expect this fruit from a thistle. This impossibility is also true

spiritually. If we are not spiritually united to Christ and thus if our faith is not genuine, it will reveal itself by the habitual absence of spiritual fruit—by a consistent failure to do the Father's will.

Congregation, when I think of North American Christianity, I am fearful that there is so much fruitless Christianity. I am fearful that there will also be many North Americans who, upon being summoned before the Judge of all the earth, will be aghast and say, "How can this be? I thought for sure that I was destined for heaven. I thought for sure that all that I did for the kingdom of heaven would qualify me to enter into heaven."

Many will say this to Christ! He will, however, proceed by saying, "And then will I profess unto them...." It is remarkable that Jesus should choose that word "profess." He is saying, "You have made your profession, but your profession will prove to be no more than an illusion. And now I will make My profession." We read that He will say, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

### **3. An Irreversible Pronouncement**

Having considered Christ's solemn assessment, followed by an urgent plea, let us now consider in the third place Christ's irreversible pronouncement. "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." That is quite a statement, congregation! First of all, it proves that there is no such thing as the apostasy of the saints. A Christian cannot lose his salvation. Christ will say to them, "*I never knew you.*" You may respond, "How can this be? How can the Judge of the all the earth say, '*I never knew you?*'" Does He, who is also very God, not know everything? Will not He know everything about us in that day?

In answering this question, we need to understand that Christ uses a word here that is used throughout the New Testament to describe knowledge that is experiential in nature. It refers to a knowledge acquired by being

in a relationship with someone, such as the knowledge a husband has of his wife and the wife of her husband, parents of their children, etc. It is acquired through an experiential relationship with someone and is therefore referred to as experiential knowledge.

To such knowledge Jesus is referring when He will say to many who will appear before Him that He never knew them. They will be the many who have called Him "Lord, Lord," who have confessed His name, and who were religiously very active. And yet they will be the many who have not been doers of the will of His Father, who did not live godly lives as a confirmation that their faith was Spirit-wrought and genuine, and in whose lives the evidence was lacking that they were living branches of the vine Jesus Christ.

Jesus will say to them, "There never was an experiential relationship between you and Me. I never knew you. There was never any connection between you and Me because had there been that connection, you would have borne fruit. But the consistent absence of the fruit of evangelical obedience, as well as your lifestyle that contradicted what you professed, only confirm that there was never a real relationship between us. I have never known you, and therefore you must now depart from me."

Oh, what solemn words they are: "Depart from me!" They will come from the same lips that now say to us even today: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). They will come from the lips of a Savior who has promised in His Word that He will in no wise cast out those who come unto Him. That Savior will then be the Judge of all the earth! To all those who have paid lip service to His name, who have professed His lordship without living in subjection to it, and who have done many things in His name, the Savior of sinners will say, "Depart from me."

Congregation, that command simply means that Jesus is telling them, "You must now go to hell." Though

they professed to be disciples of Christ and did things in His name, in the final analysis, these people will ultimately prove to be unbelievers after all—that is, ungodly men and women who never truly subjected themselves to the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ. In that great Day of Judgment, Christ will expose them for what they really are: unbelievers. They will be men and women who never had any experiential knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, who never walked with Him, who never abode in Him, who never lived out of Him, and who never truly hungered and thirsted after Him and His righteousness.

He will say, “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” The word “iniquity” can also be translated as lawlessness, and thus Christ is addressing those that work lawlessness. Another way to rephrase this would be, “Depart from me, you antinomians,” for that is exactly what this word means. An antinomian is someone who professes the name of Christ but has no use for the law of God. He is someone who believes that Christ came to deliver us from the law itself rather than from the curse of the law.

An antinomian is therefore someone who boasts of being a Christian but lives a life that contradicts his profession. Christ is referring to such when He is speaking of those who work iniquity. By these carefully chosen words, He is contrasting doing iniquity with doing His Father’s will. The people He sends away will be those who, instead of having been doers of His Father’s will have been workers of iniquity—in spite of the profession they have made.

With sadness we must conclude that antinomianism is rampant around us. Why is that so? I fear that this is a direct result of rampant presumption. There is so much presumptive faith, and there are so many presumptive conversions. Hopefully you will see the connection, for presumption and antinomianism are like Siamese twins. They are inseparably connected because a presumptuous believer is not a true believer at all; consequently, there will be no godliness to confirm that such faith is genuine,

for there is no living and fruit-bearing union with Christ. The absence of genuine union with Christ will always be exposed by the absence of genuine godliness.

Oh, beloved congregation, how will you and I fare in that day? It is with considerable reluctance that I confront you with this question. I take no delight in the fact that this message may shake you to the core of your being. And yet it is a message I must bring! As servants of God, it is our holy obligation to call you to serious self-examination. If we fail to do so, God will righteously be able to require your blood from our hands. Yet we also do this out of love for you, for when we must appear before Christ on that day, our religion will have to be the right sort—a religion vindicated by a life of evangelical obedience to God's revealed will.

It will not help us one bit if our place has always been at the Lord's Table. There will be many who will say in that day, "But, Lord, we have always dined with Thee. We have always sat at Thy table." He will then say to them, "I must declare to you that I never knew you; even though you came to My table, you were nonetheless a worker of iniquity." Do not deceive yourself by thinking that just because you come to the Lord's Table, all will be well with you. This simply is not so. On that day, the King will come and look at the guests, and He will immediately see who they are who have entered without a wedding garment—without being clothed with the garment of His righteousness.

Oh, congregation, this is such a serious matter! When that day arrives, the sheep and the goats will be divided perfectly, resulting in an eternally irreversible separation. On the right side of Christ will be all who truly love Him in sincerity and who have demonstrated that love by loving His commandments. And on His left side will be those who have merely paid lip service to Him, while simultaneously indulging in sin—all who in spite of their profession will prove to have been workers of iniquity.

As you know, on numerous occasions Christ established the link between loving Him and obeying Him, saying: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). He thereby stressed the important truth that we prove our love for Him by following Him in the pathway of obedience. It is rather easy to say, “I love Jesus.” But those words mean nothing if we are not at the same time doers of His Father’s will.

Dear friends, I am well aware of the fact that God’s children will take all of this very much to heart and may go home, saying, “I shall yet prove to be one of them.” Why? They know that their sanctification is often so deficient. They think of the sins they still commit—not only ignorantly but also against better knowledge. When God’s children fall into sin, when they are backslidden, and when they do not see any fruits in their lives, they become so troubled. They fear that they will prove to be self-deceived or a hypocrite after all. Do you know why this is so? It is because every true believer knows intuitively that there is an unbreakable relationship between faith and obedience. Therefore, when God’s children backslide, they will lose their assurance because the tangible evidence of their faith is lacking.

Perhaps it is your question: “How can I know whether I am a doer of the Father’s will, knowing that if I am not, I will not enter the kingdom of heaven?” It is because of that unsettling question that every true believer is so grateful that God inspired the Apostle Paul to record the latter half of Romans 7. There we hear the groan of a doer of God’s will. There we read of Paul wrestling intensely with the reality of sin in his life. How this grieved him! Why? Because, by the transforming grace of God, he was a doer of the will of God. As a lover and doer of God’s will, he grieved over his sin—his failure to do God’s will.

Let us therefore turn to Romans 7:14–25 to examine ourselves. Notice what Paul says in verse 15: “For that which I do I allow not.” In other words, Paul is saying

that he finds himself doing things that he is opposed to—things contrary to what he would like to do. This is confirmed by what follows: "...for what I would...." In other words, he is saying, "There is something I so much would desire to do, namely, to honor God in every aspect of my life. And yet, what I desire to do I do not, but what I hate, that I do."

This point is very important, for though God's children still sin, they hate it! Can you say that too, congregation? Can you say that you hate your sin, your backsliding, those sinful thoughts, and all those ways in which you dishonor the Christ whom you love with your whole soul?

In verse 16, Paul proceeds by saying: "If then I do that which I would not..."; that is, "If I do that which is against my desire, I consent unto the law that it is good.' The very fact that I hate my sin only confirms that I do love the law of God." He continues: "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me." The desire to do God's will and the desire to please and honor Him is most certainly there. That desire causes him to groan, saying, "...but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

Congregation, do you recognize Paul's perplexity in your own life? Is it your desire to honor God in every aspect of your life—in the work place, in your marriage, in your family, and in whatever other sphere of life there may be? Do you find yourself not doing that which you long to do, and committing evil you do not want to do? Are there sins you do not want to commit and yet find yourself doing? Again, Paul verbalizes this struggle when he writes, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man."

There you have it! This text is the confession of a doer of the Father's will—someone who can wholeheartedly say, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." This is one of the unmistakable evidences of having become a new creature through regeneration. This confession is the evidence of the life that God plants in the soul of a sinner. This is the confession of the new man within the believer, for the new man is oriented toward God and delights himself in the law of God.

There is the old nature that relentlessly attempts to regain the territory he has lost, causing the believer to say with Paul, "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Then follows that holy groan: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Congregation, this is the groan of a doer of the Father's will! Here is a man who longs for the day when he will finally be delivered from the body of this death—when he will finally be able to serve Christ perfectly. Paul, and every true believer with him, longs for that day when he will sin no more and be able to live in perfect obedience to the will of God.

Dear friends, do you long for that day? Do you understand the Apostle Paul when he cries out, "Oh, I want to be delivered from the body of this death. I want to be delivered from sin itself"? That is the cry of a man in whose heart the love of God has been shed abroad, and who has been made willing in the day of God's power. That is the cry of a man who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God, who has been transformed from being an enemy of God into being a doer of the Father's will.

Yet there is more! The same Paul who mourns deeply over the poverty and failure of his sanctification also cries out by faith, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." That is where he ends! Dear child of God, that is where we need to end also. I realize that

this sermon may have been quite unsettling for you. Let me assure you that it has also been unsettling for me—very unsettling indeed! I realize that Christ is talking here about someone like me—about one who has prophesied in His name. Therefore, how we all need to examine ourselves in the presence of an all-knowing and heart-searching God.

David exclaims in Psalm 139:23–24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me.” This petition also contains the confession of one who is a doer of the Father’s will. He is saying, “Lord, see if there be any disobedience in me, and if so, then please ‘lead me in the way everlasting.’” That was truly his desire; we too need to pray, “Search me, O God.”

Are there perhaps those among us who have arrived at the painful conclusion that what they profess with their lips is not exhibited in their lives? Then I plead with you not to persevere in your self-deceit. You may possibly know the scene in *Pilgrim’s Progress* where Bunyan observes that even from the very gate of heaven there is a way that leads to hell. There will be professing Christians who will make it that far but will not enter—men and women who died thinking they would surely enter heaven but will open their eyes in hell.

Congregation, as painful, disturbing, and unsettling as this sermon may be, it is better to be unsettled, troubled, and shaken today than to experience what Christ here prophesies, namely, to stand before Him utterly surprised and aghast, saying, “How can it be that I should not enter into the kingdom of heaven?”

My friend, should you still be someone who only professes Christ’s name while not serving Him, then acknowledge it before God this very hour. Fall on your knees before Him and say, “Lord Jesus, my life has been an empty religious show. I have professed Thy name, but I have not been a doer of the will of the Father.”

If this is your sin, and if with utmost honesty you are taking a hard look at yourself and your profession of the name of Christ, then the Lord is saying to you today, “Sinner, should you be guilty of having deceived your soul, then I say to you, ‘Oh, come and let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them as snow; though they be red as crimson, I will make them as wool’” (Isa. 1:18).

Seek the Lord Jesus today. Ask Him to make you willing by His Spirit in the day of His power, to draw you with the cords of His love, and to renew and transform you so that, by His grace, you will not only profess the name of Christ but also follow Christ in the pathway of genuine, evangelical obedience.

Congregation, we have heard the Word of the Savior who has included this passage in His Word because He has no pleasure in our death, but that we should turn to Him and live. To underscore the importance of what He said, He concludes with yet another analogy: someone who hears His Word and does it is like a wise builder, but he who hears the Word and does not do it is like a foolish builder. Do you observe that He again emphasizes the doing of His Word—the doing of His Father’s will?

Lest we would still miss the point, it is as if Christ is saying, “I will yet add one more illustration, one more parable, to make perfectly clear what I mean.” This parable reminds us of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins—a parable that also calls us to serious self-examination. The urgent and pressing question therefore is: are you a wise or a foolish builder? Are you a wise or a foolish virgin?

Let us seek the Lord; let us seek Him while He is yet to be found. Do not rest until, on the basis of biblical evidence, you know that you are indeed a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ—until you know that the fruits of the saving work of God’s Spirit are manifesting themselves in your life. You need to be able to say in the presence of an

all-knowing, heart-searching, and all-seeing God, "Lord, thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that in spite of my sin and backsliding, I love Thee, and Thou knowest that I love to do Thy will. Thou knowest that it is my desire to live a life that honors Thee. Oh, God, remember me in mercy and look upon me for Christ's sake."

If, therefore, you grieve over your sin, dear believer, and if even now you have been convicted of the discrepancy between your profession and your life, then the precious Word of God addresses you, saying: "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1–2).

Let me conclude by urging you with all the love of my heart not to rest until you know that your faith is genuine—that you are indeed a living and fruit-bearing branch of the vine Jesus Christ. Only then can it be well with your soul. The Apostle John underscores this when he writes, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:3–5).

My final and urgent question therefore is, are you in Christ, and do you know Him experientially? If so, you will be a doer of His Father's will—even if your doing of the Father's will is still tainted with sin and you have only a small beginning of this new obedience. The fact remains, however, that Christ declares with clarity and simplicity in our text that only the doers of His Father's will—and they alone!—shall enter the kingdom of heaven, for "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17). Amen.

# Flee Babylon!

*Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven*

Psalter 224

Scripture: Revelation 17:1–6; Rev. 18

Psalter 253:1–7

Sermon Text: Revelation 18:4–5

Psalter 260

Psalter 253:10–12

*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.*

—Revelation 18:4–5

Revelation 18 gives a picture of sudden, complete, and utter destruction of the present sinful world order called Babylon. This present sinful world order which is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-Christian is represented by the city of Babylon. This is not unique to Revelation. Already in Genesis we see the development of Babel, the city that sought to reach up unto God. That has continued throughout Scripture. In the prophets we often read of Babylon in its opposition and hatred towards God. Babylon's influence is worldwide. Its influence is felt each and every day in our lives and hearts. It is opposed to the Word of God. It is opposed to God. It is opposed to Christ and His rule. That is why we are called to come out of her, to flee that we “be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” God is judging this world, reserving the fury of His wrath against sin. That wrath will be unleashed in a final act of judgment pictured here. Our text is Revelation 18:4–5 within the context of Revelation 18. Our theme is “Flee Babylon,” with three thoughts to

consider. First, the picture of Babylon presented. Second, the punishment of Babylon administered. Third, the people in Babylon addressed.

### **The Picture Of Babylon Presented**

In Revelation 17:1–6, an impressive picture begins to emerge of Babylon. The apostle John sees Babylon sparkling in false beauty, yet full of smut and filthiness. He sees her drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus. John is amazed at this picture. It is a picture that is attractive, yet at the same time repulsive. It is a picture of a city that is mighty, self-sufficient, a city drunk with the pleasures of this world, satiated yet never satisfied.

Do you recognize this city? You do, don't you? It is the sinful aspect of the world in which we live. It is a larger version of what is in our hearts by nature. We build mighty, self-sufficient cities, Babylons, in our own hearts. We are influenced by this woman, this harlot, this seductive world. We so easily are drunk with the pleasures of this world. We have the wool pulled over our eyes and we become blind to the world and its seduction. We fall into its trap. But I need to warn you that judgment is coming upon this city. Listen to the voice of Christ, “Come out of her, my people, lest ye be partakers of her sins, and her judgments come upon you.”

Why should you heed this voice? Because Babylon is *fallen*. It's as good as done. The angel in verse 2, shining with heavenly glory, shouts with a powerful voice, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.” Yes, this sinful world continues on today, but its end is certain. The angel speaks in the past tense, showing that in God's eyes, this city is done, destroyed, and obliterated in the fury of God's wrath.

If you are still in Babylon today, living in the world, seduced and blinded by sin, you are being warned to flee. Flee, or you will face judgment. The world elevates itself

and puffs itself up in sin, but it is fallen. If you live in Babylon, in the world, you serve a fallen god, subject to the eternal wrath and judgment of Almighty God.

Babylon is presented in verse 2 as a rotting corpse deserted of all life. It is only inhabited by devils, wild animals and buzzards that feed off dead flesh. Babylon, this world, is bleak and hopeless. Don't you see it when you look around you? Despite its glamor and seeming wealth, this world is falling apart at the seams. Michael Jackson is dead. Tiger Woods is not a role model, but a moral failure. Lindsey Lohan is known for nothing else but immorality and drugs, not to mention the countless other moral failures splashed across the newspapers. They all claim a life full of happiness, riches, and glamor, but it is hollow. *There is no satisfaction*; without hope and without God in the world, the world is hollow, empty, and shallow without Christ.

The American Dream claims the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but what has it wrought economically? It has contributed to prosperity for many, but for countless others there is only crippling credit card debts, mortgage foreclosures, and economic disaster. The world groans under the effects of sin.

The world in its sinful pleasures is a hollow shell, a rotting corpse, with nothing to offer. Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen! Life without Christ in this world is a miserable existence. But Christ calls, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and of her judgment!”

Despite its fallenness, Babylon is an *influential* city. Babylon has far-reaching political and economic influence. Verse 3 says it this way, “For *all nations* have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and *the kings* of the earth have committed fornication with her, and *the merchants* of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

Babylon has a lot to offer, it seems. There is no nation,

no person untouched by its influence. Kings and rulers have been seduced by the promise of power, pleasure, and wealth. The merchants of the earth are seduced by the economic advantage in this city and have literally become rich through the abundance of her sensual living. This city traffics in all sorts of pleasures and she is the great peddler of sensuality.

What relevance to our day, when we see the rulers of the world, partaking of this city with reckless abandon, grasping its power, pleasures, and wealth. And it seems that the rulers draw the citizens along with them. Nations flock to Babylon to improve standards of life and luxury, living in open immorality in the name of progress.

The businessmen of this world are often influenced by the dollar signs offered by the philosophy of this world. You make it rich and you'll have power and influence and popularity. There is money and pleasure in this city.

This is the general bent of the society in which we live, isn't it? Is this where you are? Babylon can be so influential in our lives, in our way of living, and our thinking. The world encroaches on us and we are seduced, blinded, and swallowed by it. Christ calls, "Flee Babylon, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins."

Babylon is also a *sinful* city. In verse 5 we read, "For her sins have reached unto heaven." The measuring cup is full. Sin has reached its climax and is literally heaped unto heaven, before the very presence of God. How long can this last before God unleashes His righteous anger and judgment against this world? Are not His judgments already seen in the sins so prevalent in our culture—by and large a culture of death and deviant sexuality?

Have your sins added to this heap? Our society has become largely lawless. Many have become a law unto themselves. We have become lovers of ourselves. We've become enamored with ourselves, with our own sinful image. We've exchanged the truth of God for a lie and give honor to the creature rather than to the Creator.

Have you partaken of the sins of this city? Are you making yourself a subject of God's coming wrath and justice? Is this city where your allegiance lies? Or does it lie with Christ, who satisfied the wrath of God against the sins of His people? Are you still in Babylon today? Christ cries out, "Come out of her, my people. Don't stay; judgment is coming upon this sinful city!"

Babylon is also a *sensual* city. The nations, kings, and merchants have committed fornication with her. Every sensual pleasure can be found in Babylon. The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life can be satisfied here.

Babylon is like Sodom and Gomorrah, full of pride, having fulness of bread and abundance of idleness (Ezek. 16:49). The citizens of Babylon are settled and content, blinded by riches and sensual pleasures, committing fornication with her.

How many of you as Christians are doing the same today? Are you committing spiritual adultery with the world, claiming to love God yet living like a citizen of Babylon? Are you blinded by her wealth and sensual pleasures?

We live in a society obsessed with the sexual to the point where everything is normal. Purity is cheap. Pornography abounds. Adultery is called serial monogamy. Homosexuality is now a lawful way to live in many places. Money is no object to satisfy the lusts that rise up in us. Are you taken in by this culture? How are you being influenced by this world's emphasis in your minds and hearts? Have you succumbed? Come out of her, lest you be partakers of her sins and judgment!

Babylon is really a *God-less and a Christ-less city*. That is why she is so sensual and full of every pleasure of this world. The world seems to be so attractive, "yet Babylon is rotten. This is the sum total of her longing, what she can see and smell and taste and feel and hear. This is the fruit she longs for. She aches for this; she hun-

gers and thirsts for this—the world and the things of this world with God shut out completely.”<sup>1</sup>

Babylon, this world, is self-sufficient with no desire for God. She is proud and over-confident, “For she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow” (Rev. 18:7). She is a Christ-less city because she has no room for the people of Christ. Her streets are filled with the blood of the martyrs as we read in verse 24. Her philosophy is anti-Christ, anti-gospel, and anti-God.

This is how the world lives today; full of self, self-assured, anti-God and anti-Christ, confident that judgment will never come. Is that how you are living today? Do you still live in Babylon? Is your heart still there? Do you trust in a false gospel? Do you live without fear of judgment, committing adultery with the world and forsaking God? Or do you sit back to wait for God to work and in the meantime partake of Babylon’s pleasures because God will work when He wants to?

Though you have forsaken God and turned your back on Him, He calls out to you today, “Come out of her. Flee for your life. Judgment is coming on this present evil world. Her iniquities are full. Come out and find safety and rest and peace and complete satisfaction and removal of judgment in Me.”

### **The Punishment Administered**

Babylon is a city under judgment. This is clear from the opening words, “Babylon the great is fallen!”

It is also clear throughout the chapter. Read verse 5, “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.” When God remembers something, things begin to change. He begins to turn things around. So with Babylon. He will destroy utterly. He will

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1. Geoff Thomas, “Overview of Revelation 18,” Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales, [www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk](http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk), accessed June 19, 2009.

bring judgment upon this city, upon this world. It is foolish to live in such a city.

The judgment that God will administer is *complete*. This is pictured in verse 6, “Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.”

Babylon is to receive a punishment that fits her sins. Her cup of judgment is full and complete and will be poured out completely upon her. God’s wrath and judgment hang over Babylon and the world. Will you escape this judgment unscathed? Come out of her to Jesus! Give God no rest till you are free from Babylon!

The punishment will also be *sure*. The mighty angel we’ve seen speaks in the past tense, “Babylon is fallen!” It’s a sure thing in the mind of God because of the awful sins that the world has heaped up to heaven. God will come. He will mete out punishment perfectly!

Do you seek to escape this sure punishment? Then come out of Babylon and flee for your life! Flee to Jesus again! Have you been soiled and sullied by the world? Come to Jesus and find cleansing in His blood and clothing in His righteousness. Flee the sins of Babylon; don’t look back, but look to Jesus! His death has removed punishment for sin. Hide in His propitiation!

This punishment upon Babylon will also be *swift*. Her complacency and seeming peace will be shattered by judgment in a single day. Verse 8 says, “Therefore shall her plagues come in *one day*, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.” The world cannot trifle with God, for He is strong and right in His judgment. Praise God from whom all judgment flows!

Those who have benefitted from Babylon will mourn this swift judgment. In verse 10 they cry out, “Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in *one hour* is thy judgment come!” Babylon will be reduced to rubble.

Everything that seems so attractive about this world

in terms of its sin will be destroyed in an instant. In verse 17 we read, “For in *one hour* so great riches is come to nought.” The nations, kings, and merchants felt secure in this city within its walls, but destruction comes in one hour! Do you think that you are safe behind the sinful pleasures of this world? Your infatuation with money, sensual pleasures, and power will be reduced to nothing in one hour. Are you secure, thinking that judgment will come much later? Your security can be reduced to nothing in one hour.

Look at the world and how things go awry. This week, a tornado and vicious storm ripped through New York. No one was expecting it. Within minutes an airplane can plunge into the sea. The stock markets plunge within a day. The Twin Towers crash within an hour. An earthquake strikes suddenly. These are warnings, mini-versions of the fearful judgment that is to come on a world that is opposed to God and His King. Where is your security, congregation? Is it in this world or in the voice of Jesus that calls you to come out of this world to Him for eternal security?

We see that punishment is also *victorious*. God’s people delight in the judgment upon this great city and what she represents. Everything about this city goes against who God is and what His people stand for. Its wicked culture, its saturation of riches, its emphasis on the sensual, and its God-less and Christ-less philosophy stands glaringly in opposition to the call for us to be separate from the world. The world opposes us and hates us, but the world will be destroyed by God’s judgment. The godless world persecutes God’s people, but it will be met with judgment. God’s people in heaven and on earth will rejoice at this final judgment upon Babylon and its sin.

The Lord says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom. 12:19). This vengeance upon the wicked is the victory of the saints. The voice commands God’s people

in verse 20, “Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.”

This victorious judgment already began on the cross, when Christ crushed Satan’s head. This is brought to a head in the destruction of Babylon and the casting of Satan into the lake of fire. The epicenter of sin will be destroyed, no more to reverberate in our lives. This world which has spouted its hatred and venom towards God and us will be silent. The blood of the martyrs and saints will be paid for in the just and triumphant judgment of God.

Those who grew rich off of Babylon mourn her destruction. Their livelihood is gone. This mourning is pictured in verses 9–20. The merchants and sailors weep and wail and lament, but the destruction of Babylon is God’s victory. It is also the victory of God’s people. Here we see the dual reaction to the destruction of Babylon. God’s people rejoice but Babylon’s friends and inhabitants mourn. What will you do?

This judgment is finally *irreversible*. In verse 21, a mighty angel takes a large millstone and casts it into the sea, picturing irreversible judgment. This is not just a small stone, but a huge stone turned by oxen to grind grain into flour. The angel takes this stone and hurls it into the sea and it lodges there never to appear again.

Babylon will never be resurrected again. It will disappear and be forgotten. This is the end of those who remain in Babylon. There is no future there. There is irreversible and sure judgment coming upon this world.

Her riches will be destroyed. Her economic engine will be silenced as we read in verses 12–14. In verses 22–23, life grinds to a halt as we know it. There will be an eerie silence. There will be no more music. Production of goods will stop, lights will be snuffed out, and weddings will no longer be celebrated. Merchants, the city’s great men, are dead. There will be nothing but complete and utter destruction.

Do you see the futility of aligning yourself with this city, this present, evil world? She rides upon the beast which represents Satan. She is full of wickedness and her fate is sealed in the judgment of God upon her. She will be utterly destroyed. Make no mistake, her judgment is as good as done. Christ calls out again in mercy, "Come out of her and escape the complete, sure, victorious, and irreversible judgment!"

### **The People Addressed**

Christ issues this call to come out of Babylon, to forsake her, in verses 4 and 5, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues; for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

Christ issues this plea to forsake the world and to flee to Him. If we forsake Babylon we can flee to Him by faith. There is no other place to go. We must prepare our hearts to meet God and that includes cutting ourselves off from a world of sin and temptation, a world, ripe for, and perhaps already under, judgment. Where are you taking refuge today? Are you still building your precarious and weak defenses in Babylon or are you taking refuge in Christ, "A habitation whereunto you can continually resort" (Ps. 73:3)?

Look to whom this plea is addressed. Christ addresses His own people, "Come out of her, *my people*." It is a call today to those who profess faith in Christ to forsake this city. Like the angels came to Lot and told him to flee for his life's sake, so we are told to flee for our life's sake, to never look back! Flee, don't look back!

We are to separate ourselves spiritually from the world and its attractions and amusements. The world tries to numb our spiritual consciousness by satisfying us temporarily with pleasures, but we cannot be part of Babylon and part of Christ. The world wants to amuse us. The word "amuse" is a French word and literally means

“no thinking.” The world wants to stop us from thinking about God and the final judgment that awaits.

I’m afraid many of us, including myself, live too loosely in regards to the world. We think that we can have a foot in both worlds, but Christ calls us out, to renew our allegiance with Him so that we might not be partakers of Babylon’s sins and receive of her judgment. He pleads with us to flee to Him afresh and find in Him what we need to live a life of holiness and thankfulness to Him.

It is a call to watchfulness over our lives to see whether we, perhaps without even thinking about it, have slipped back through the gates of Babylon. Christ says in Luke 21:36, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Perhaps you thought you could slip back in just once, but the city’s influence is so powerful that it has dragged you back in. “Come out, break off association with this evil city of sin and wickedness.” Are you looking for an exit?

There is an exit! There is a cross-shaped exit that Christ shows us if we have again been defiled by the sins of Babylon. By issuing this call, Christ displays His merits and righteousness for all to see and hear. Escape through this cross-shaped exit. Leave the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of this city behind and taste and see that the Lord is good!

Perhaps there are those who have not yet left the city of Babylon before. Perhaps there are times where you felt sick of this world and its pleasures. You wanted to be rid of the dirt and sensuality and you wanted to escape, but you can’t escape in your own power. The city still has its grip on you and yet you search for an exit.

Here is the exit being offered in the invitation and command of Christ, “Come out of her, my people.” Don’t let God alone till you have been set free, delivered from the bondage of Babylon. Christ is calling you to change

your allegiances from being a lover of the world to being a lover of Christ.

You can't find the exit from Babylon? Here is the cross, the exit from Babylon! Christ has provided a way of escape through the cross. Here you can find new life and rest from the pleasure and pride of this world. No matter how the world has ravaged you or attempted to destroy you, here at the cross there is life and restoration from a life of sin. That is what the cross represents, Christ's death and resurrection, a cross-shaped exit from Babylon. Do you find your life in Babylon, or do you find your life in Christ?

Christ calls again, "Come out, come out! Come to Me, come to Me! I will give you rest from sin and temptation. I will shelter you from Babylon's devices. In Me and My Spirit you can find strength to fight against the seduction of this world. Will you not come out and come to Me? There is no sin too great that I cannot forgive."

Have you spent all your capital in Babylon? You can't buy salvation, you say? You are poor and impoverished? Isaiah 55:1–2 says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfies not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." There is salvation for those fleeing from Babylon, for those who leave its riches behind!

Perhaps there are those of you who have no desire to leave Babylon. You love its pleasures. You take pride in your own accomplishments and rest in them. You ignore Christ's call to come out. You love it so much and you've become fat and lazy on the world's pleasures.

Do you still ignore the cross, the exit from Babylon? Do you continue saying, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be

merry.” Are you so secure to ignore the salvation that God offers through His Son? Are you flippantly rejecting the gospel, closing your ears to it?

Then God will say, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided” (Luke 12:19–20)? Or is this voice of Christ, this warning to you today just like Lot’s message to his sons-in-law. Lot seemed to them as one who mocked. “And Lot went out and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters and said, Up, get you out of this place: for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law” (Gen. 19:14). Are you mocking and snickering at this warning and call of Christ to come out? Are you so self-assured? Will you lose your soul for a few fading pleasures of this world, only to be judged by God? The call still comes in mercy, “Come out of her my people.”

This plea is urgent because Babylon is as good as fallen. This plea is urgent because judgment is coming. This world’s sins have reached unto heaven.

Where are you finding shelter from judgment? Is it in the blood and righteousness, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Have you exited Babylon through the cross of Christ?

Christ calls once more, full of gospel love and mercy, not desiring that any should perish because of the judgment coming upon Babylon, “Come out of her, my people, and be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” The door has been thrown open to escape from Babylon. I urge you, yes, more, Christ urges you and commands you, “Come out, lest ye perish!” Amen.