

GOD'S
HEAVENLY REGISTER
THE
SAINT'S GROUND OF REJOICING;

BEING
A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT RATTLEDEN, IN SUFFOLK,

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BY JOHN STEVENS,

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1823.

GOD'S HEAVENLY REGISTER,

ETC. ETC.

LUKE, x. 20.

But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

WE are informed, by the context, what means the Lord of glory adopted when he appeared to set up his spiritual kingdom in this world; when he would gather together the objects of supreme election; when he would collect into one family the purchased of his blood. Then, to promote this grand design, he lifted the sacred standard of spiritual liberty in the land of slavery; he employed seventy disciples, and sent them, two and two, before his face, into every city and place whither he himself would come. This was a pleasing procedure; and this showed the important office of the Christian ministry, — which is, to go into every city, town, and village, whither the Lord our Saviour means to come in the day of his power. Where he intends to be known, to be loved, and admired, thither would he have his messengers go forth, and proclaim salvation from ruin by his own death on the cross. Thus went out the honoured seventy, as commissioned by their divine Teacher and adorable Lord.

What might very naturally be expected? Why, that these poor men would, generally speaking, be little prepared for the events which were advancing; they were overcome with the attendant consequences of their mission.

When they beheld rebellious sinners reconciled, and devils ejected and departing at their word, they hastened to tell their Master what was done. "The very devils," said they, "are subject to us through thy name." To him, however, they could bring no information; accordingly, he replied, "I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven." 'Nevertheless,' said he, 'rejoice not in this his sudden downfall, or that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' We are apt to be taken with things marvellous; but God would have us taken with things merciful. Simply to work miracles, or be an instrument in the Lord's hand to perform wonders, ought not so much to excite our joy, as that our names are recorded in heaven. Interest in sovereign grace is of far higher worth than the possession of miraculous endowments. Balaam and Judas had the latter; but the elect only have ever inherited the former. Well, therefore, might our blessed Lord say, *Rejoice* not that the spirits are subject unto you; *but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.* Thus freely did our Saviour disclose their interest in the book of life. Here was no concealing of this sovereign privilege, as a point dangerous to be known. He rather lays it down as a useful piece of sacred knowledge — a point that concerned every true disciple, and a holy principle on which religious joy should be cherished. "Your names," said he, "*are* written in heaven." Whatever it means, it certainly was considered by him as a proper ground for holy rejoicing. It must also be something that may be safely known and firmly believed; something that has no evil tendency; for we must admit that our blessed Lord has laid down no injurious principles; all his instructions were suited to promote the glory of God, and the sanctity and happiness of his followers. I make this remark, because there are some professors of religion, who seem afraid that the doctrines of sovereign grace, and of divine decision concerning the

states of men, should be known. Their idea is, that if people know their interest in Christ, and become assured of their final salvation, they will live like devils, and drink in iniquity as the thirsty ox drinketh in water; and that because they are sure they shall not be damned, they will resolve upon having their fill of sin. But the reasoning is unfair, and the sentiment altogether unscriptural. It only remains for a man to be truly sensible of the favour expressed in the text, and his heart becomes the more fortified against the encroachments of vice.* The words before us were spoken by Him who well understood what it was to be in heaven, for he had been there: they were spoken by Him who well knew what it was to have a name in the holy register above, for he himself had been the great keeper of the register;—yes, the Lord of glory himself said, that it was matter of joy to know that their names were written in heaven. He therefore exhorted his elated disciples to rejoice because of this great privilege, rather than because the spirits were subject unto them. I now,

FIRST, Inquire what our Saviour could mean by this figurative expression, — *your names are written in heaven.*

SECONDLY, Observe to whom the language is applicable, so that we may say to them, *YOUR names are written in heaven.*

THIRDLY, Notice the encouraging exhortation given to such highly favoured persons: — *REJOICE because your names are written in heaven.*

To proceed with our first head. The Apostle said to the Hebrews, “Ye are come to the general assembly and church of the first-born, *which are written in heaven.*”† And our adorable Lord himself, in his address to the angel of the church in Sardis, alluding to the same figure

* He that can sin because he is safe and salvation is free, may expect to suffer because he is presumptuous and damnation is sure!

† Heb. xii. 23.

of speech, says, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and *I will not blot his name out of the book of life*; but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."* "I intreat thee also, (said Paul), true yoke-fellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and other my fellow-labourers, *whose names are in the book of life*."† When John had a view of the throne of judgment, he also "saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, *which is the book of life*; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." And he observed, that "whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." He further subjoined, "There shall in no wise enter into the new Jerusalem any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: *but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life*."‡ These passages agree with the words of our text; they speak of the same heavenly interest, and under a similarity of language. The figurative expression of being written in heaven, seems to refer to the custom of the Jews and the Persians, who had their registers of notable persons and events, edicts and ordinances: the Jews, especially, kept, with great exactness, for thousands of years, their genealogical tables; according to which the families of their priests were distinguished, and appointed to their sacred functions; and such as could not produce their register were put from the priesthood as polluted.|| And, because those writings were lodged in the temple at Jerusalem, Isaiah speaks of persons being written among the living in Jerusalem; and Ezekiel also alludes to certain prophets who were not allowed to be written in the writing of the

* Rev. iii. 5.

† Phil. iv. 3.

‡ Rev. xx. 12, and xxi. 27. See also xiii. 8, and xvii. 8.

|| Ezra, ii. 62.

house of Israel. David, likewise, when speaking of wicked men, says, *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.** Now, as the kings of Persia kept their records by them, and as Jerusalem, the holy city, was God's earthly residence, and the records referring to the kingdom of Israel were there deposited, hence arose the figurative expression, of *names being written in heaven*: Jerusalem being esteemed an emblem of the city of God above. What Ezekiel calls the house of Israel, in the type, Paul calls the church of the first-born, in the antitype.

It appears, from the instance of Mordecai, as noted in the book of Esther, that the Persian kings judged their servants according to what was found written in the records preserved in their presence; for Mordecai was exalted to honour and dignity on account of his good conduct in defence of the king. And to the like effect the Lord speaks by the prophet Malachi, saying, "Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it: and *a book of remembrance was written before him* for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name; and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." According to this book of remembrance, it is intimated, the Lord will proceed in that day of accounts, when it shall be easy to "discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Then they whose names are found in the book of life will enter into, and inherit, the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

Let the preceding citations and observations suffice to evidence the literal import of the figure adopted in our text; and to show that the eternal God, who dwells in his glorious mansion and temple above, keeps there a faithful register

* Isaiah, iv. 3. Ezek. xiii. 9. Psalm, lxi. 28.

of all the numerous concerns of the children of men. He has always present to his view an accurate and infallible statement of all the transactions of the world, from the first creation to the last great burning day. The signification of our Lord's words may be further set forth in six particulars.

1. They denote *the eternal foreknowledge of God in Christ*, according to which he has ordained the salvation of his people. This is not simple knowledge, but knowledge founded in the divine will, and inseparable from a delight in the objects known. God's love supposes his knowledge, and to him his people have ever been present in their representing Head. This knowledge is a gracious and practical knowledge in God; and is displayed in all the acts of his saving power, according to his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is distinct, perfect, and perpetual, embracing all the minute concerns of his beloved people: as one who keeps a regular journal of all his affairs has them continually before him; so the Lord is represented as having a book of remembrance written before him, in which all things are perpetually present to his view. This is not to signify that he needs or uses books, literally; but to intimate the *accuracy* of his knowledge, and the *greatness of his care* over his people. Thus, when certain articles are of great importance to us, we are the more careful to take an exact account of them; we write them down: so, because God would lose none of his beloved ones, he wrote their names in heaven: and in the last day, when the register of his family will be brought forward, every one will be found in the general assembly, according to the book of life: they shall all answer to their names; and the eternal purpose, the meritorious purchase, and the almighty power, of the Triune God, shall be finally displayed in perfect harmony. It will be seen, that whom the Father loved, the Son redeemed, and the Holy Ghost sanctified.

2. Your names being written in heaven, *is expressive of your eternal election* to grace and glory, in and through Christ Jesus. Foreknowledge and election are not only connected, but they are inseparable: for, when our blessed Lord said, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven," it must indicate, not only that they are known in heaven, but that they are *chosen* in heaven, according to that foreknowledge of God the Father; as the apostle Peter has declared. In the sacred oracles we read, that many are called into an open profession, but that few are chosen: that God will surely avenge his own elect, that cry unto him day and night: that, whom he did foreknow, them he did predestinate, the same he calls, the same he justifies, and finally glorifies: that there remaineth a remnant, according to the election of grace: that the election have obtained salvation in every age, while the rest were blinded: that the purpose of God, according to election, stands; not of works, but of him that calleth: that God hath chosen his people, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love: that Paul endured all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. This sentiment, though so plainly scriptural, is very unwelcome to many who profess to be Christians; but their opposition has neither ability nor tendency to alter or refute the truth of God.

A sick man may not like the doctor's medicine; would you therefore not give it him? A naughty child has an objection to the rod; would you therefore spare him? A thief has an objection, at times, to the day-light; would you therefore vote for darkness? In many instances we find objections raised, which have no real weight, to determine us to change our minds, or even in the least to shake our confidence. Election is not an act of justice, but of sovereign grace. Non-election involves no injus-

tice to the persons passed by ; for, if God had chosen none, his character would have remained forever blameless. Has any man a claim upon the favour of his Maker ? Can he, who might have been forever banished from God without injustice, have a right to live ? Can the grace of interest in heavenly perfection be according to man's desert ? Nay, must it not proceed upon principles of the purest grace, and of pactional justice, if his name be written there ?—of grace, as to his own unworthiness ; and of justice, as to his Saviour's merit ? Surely God may dispense his favours as he pleases.* If Peter be saved and Judas lost, what can account for this difference ? Would you answer by saying, Peter repented ? I also demand why he repented ? Nothing but divine favour can account for the difference. God would extend mercy to Peter, who could no more deserve it than Judas, while he left Judas to his own choice, and to fit himself for his own place, as a son of perdition.

If you carefully examine the Scriptures, you will find, that sovereign election is one of the peculiar principles laid down to encourage the hope of a penitent sinner. If a man feel his want, and desire mercy, election has caused him to possess that feeling, and to experience that desire : but if he do not desire such things at the Lord's hand, what has he to do with quarrelling about election ? The law holds him fast by the throat, sternly crying, *Pay me that which thou owest !* There is nothing in the doctrine of election to cause the petitioning penitent to despair. There is nothing in it to encourage the self-righteous pretender to reckon himself religious in the sight of God. But, on the contrary, it cuts down the pride and vanity of presumptuous man ; while it kindly shields the helpless, the humble, and the sin-sick soul, from every threatening ill. Besides, this elevating sentiment greatly encourages

* Psalm cxv. 3. Matt. xx. 15, 16. Rom. ix. 14, 16.

the returning convert to knock boldly at the door of mercy, who would never have approached that door, had not electing grace brought him near. I can only subjoin, for the present, that without election our names are not *written in heaven*.

3. Our text denotes, that *all God's foreknown and loved people are perpetually represented in heaven, in the person of Christ*, who is the High Priest over the house of God : in him they are seated in heavenly places, and in him their life is securely hid. The Lamb's book is the Lamb's person : his human nature is the pure tablet on which are engraven the names of all his saints. They are ever present before the eternal throne, in him, like as the high priest of old had the names of the heads of Israel's tribes engraven on his breastplate, when he went in before the Lord. Therefore, our names being written in Christ, our persons represented by Christ, and seated in heaven in Christ, are kindred ideas, and seem to express the same favour for substance. As it is *in him* that we are loved and chosen, adopted and justified, brought near and glorified ; so, *in him* we see the immutable record of lives and of the living, and all the eternal Father's decrees and promises concerning them. This is he who draws near to the everlasting throne for his distinguished people, and bears them deeply graven on the bosom of his love ; and through him are we, adoring sinners, emboldened to draw nigh to our prayer-hearing God and Father. All the lines of wisdom are extended to us in him, and he contains all the writings of heaven : — *in him our names are written in heaven*.

4. The language of our Lord further intimates, that *the people are all exactly numbered in heaven*, being distinctly and by name there written. While the believer stands in Christ every moment ; while he is ever covered in his righteousness and sprinkled with his blood ; while the divine eye falls upon him, and upon all the church, in

this exalted Head; and the whole are distinctly and forever known in this blessed centre of union and perfection; what sure ground for triumph and rejoicing is herein afforded! The number of the people who will finally appear in heaven is known. God has so accurately counted that not one can be lost. Like as a shepherd takes the charge of a numbered flock, and becomes responsible accordingly, — so our dear Lord received his people, as their Surety, at the hands of his and their Father, and he will take good heed that they be all presented in the last great day of accounts. He will then be able to say — and shall be heard to say, — “Of all which thou hast given me I have lost none: here am I and the children which thou hast given me.” Infinite wisdom requires this; yea, all the divine attributes require it. For the salvation of men is not simply for their sakes, but to display the character of God and to glorify his name; which yet could not be done if any want of forethought, prudence, or power, marked the plan; if iniquity shaded it, if feebleness attended it, or if ignorance appeared in it, it would not be worthy of a God, nor could it be safe for man. We are, however, glad to know, that divine prescience comprehends all the sons of heaven, and that boundless love is fixed in Christ upon them all; infinite and sovereign grace has secured them all; the eternal purpose of grace includes them all; the purchase of Christ is accepted for them all; the robe of imputed righteousness is cast over them all; the coming of the Holy Spirit is in pursuit of them all; and, while true faith is bestowed on them all, the whole salvation of the gospel is graciously intended for them all. Hence, the number is known and unalterably fixed, and *their names are all written in heaven.*

5. Another idea suggested in the words is this: that the Lord Jesus Christ, the immortal King of glory, and overseer of his church, has made an *open acknowledgment*

of his people, and has pledged himself for their safety and eternal life. That memorable expression of Judah to his venerable father, respecting his young brother Benjamin, illustrates the subject: "I," said he, "will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame forever."* Has not this ever been, for substance, the gracious language of our elder Brother, in his Father's presence above? Did not all his life and behaviour speak to the same effect?—'Father, I will be Surety for them for good; for thy glory and their salvation: if I redeem them not from all evil, if I set them not in order before thee, then let me bear the blame forever.' He was sworn in covenant for the safety of his brethren; and hence the apostle says, "Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest; for those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath, by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Mechisedec; by so much was Jesus made a Surety of a better testament."† Now, in becoming thus their Surety, by covenanting for them, he freely acknowledged them in heaven as his *charge* and *care*, and *they became written in heaven*, as a people immutably loved and sovereignly appointed to obtain salvation.

6. Once more, and I have finished this part of my subject. The words of our Lord imply that *his disciples have a legal right to, and an unforfeitable interest in, the heavenly world*. For why should our names be written in heaven, if we had indeed *no interest* therein? And if his disciples had no right or title to that celestial joy, why did he say, *Rejoice that your names are written in heaven?* Neither would he thus have spoken if their names were only so written that they might another day be blotted out, and their persons finally disowned. Nor

* Gen. xliii. 9. Rom. viii. 29. † Heb. vii. 20, 22. Psalm cx. 4.

can it be imagined, that those disciples to whom he addressed himself had written their names in heaven. The book of life is written and kept by the living God, and eternal life is his gift; also "his gifts and calling are without repentance." Surely the almighty Ruler of the skies had an indisputable right to do as he pleased in the dispensation of his favour. He foreknew, loved, adopted, justified, and exalted his people, in the person of the Lord Jesus, from everlasting. Is there any injustice implied in his so doing? He left the rest under the law of their creation state, to answer for their own guilt. Can this part of the divine conduct be justly charged with unrighteousness? What sinner can have a right to mercy? He that is innocent needs no mercy; he that is guilty can deserve none. It is impossible that God should be bound by his nature to forgive sins; for then he never could either hate or punish it, as he cannot deny himself. He was at liberty to be merciful or not; but he could not be unjust, either to himself or any of his creatures — for "there is no unrighteousness in him."

We have thus observed, my brethren, that the words of our text are expressive of a gracious foreknowledge of a peculiar people in Christ; of their eternal election to grace and glory; of their being perpetually represented in Christ, as the Lord of Glory; of their being all numbered exactly; of their also being acknowledged by Christ as their Surety; and, finally, of their having a legal and unforfeitable claim to the heavenly inheritance. Behold, what manner of love is here revealed! How delightfully do all the perfections of our God shine forth in this unanticipated salvation of men! There are, however, many professors, who are so far from delighting in this stupendous and glorious manifestation of the favour of the eternal God, that they rather feel irritated by the unrestrained declaration of them: they consider it as giving full reins to a spirit of dangerous liberty. But our blessed

and holy Lord did not seem to be of that mind, when he called on his followers to rejoice because their names were written in heaven. The doctrine does indeed impart liberty, but not a licentious one. It is liberty from sinful slavery and Satan's tyranny; liberty to approach to God and to call on his name; liberty to esteem Jesus Christ our great High Priest and faithful Advocate with the Father; liberty to walk with God, and do his will in all things; yea, liberty to anticipate the kingdom of heaven as our final home. But surely such liberty can injure no one. If any man profess an interest in election without due regard to his sanctification, we object to his character, and deem him presumptuous and vain. He that affects confidence without good principle, is like a man who claims an estate without any legal right.

We come now to the second part of our subject, and therefore shall,

SECONDLY, Observe to whom the language of our text is applicable, so that we may say to them, *YOUR names are written in heaven*. Who they are may be matter of inquiry; but that there are a people who are so written cannot be doubted by any one, who admits the divine authenticity of the Scriptures. That some are written in heaven is no merit of theirs; neither is it any fault of others that they are not there written. For election is an act of sovereignty, and is in no degree ruled by any thing in the persons chosen. In the act of election, God viewed all the creatures as equal and alike; so that no reason could appear for taking some rather than others, besides that of his own good pleasure. They who were passed by were equally deserving with others who were elected. Therefore, non-election was not governed by the character of the creature, but simply by the will of God. This reasoning is conclusive, whether we consider the persons out of whom the election was made, as fallen or unfallen. But we are now to attend to *character*, and to that as the

effect, and so consequently the *evidence*, of election, and of being written in heaven. Now, if holiness be the effect of election, it cannot be its cause. When we come to set a mark upon property, it becomes us to take heed that we mark the right. So, putting a wrong label on a bottle may prove a fatal deception: and you country people must know, that it is highly necessary for the farmer to be careful to affix his brand upon no sheep but his own; let every man mark his own, and let his neighbour's alone. A right to the creature precedes the marking of it; and we may be sure that our blessed Lord will seal none but his own: he will make no unlawful claims, nor will he resign his just rights. His words, in our text, are applicable in the following respects:—

1. To those *who are born from and for above*, and who are looking up to heaven as the dwelling place of their God and Father. The peculiar change wrought upon them is by power from above, and they are born to ascend to the celestial mansions. Even in their natural birth they are born for God: He forms them, both naturally and spiritually, for himself, that they may show forth his praise. Has not the divine potter power over the clay that he has made, so as to form it as he pleases? May he not make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour? Will you dispute the matter with the Almighty? Could the guilty sinner have any claim on the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost? By regeneration God has set apart him that is godly for himself; and this heavenly birth is the effect of a heavenly interest, and therefore proves, that every one who is the subject of it is *written in heaven*. Thus Christ, who is the Head of life, comes down, in the power of his Spirit, to quicken the dead member, who is naturally dead in sin, though under an election interest in his living Head; and hereby the sinful soul receives life from above,— grace from heaven, grace from the fulness of Christ, grace that influences all

its powers, and affects the whole deportment of the newborn man. Such are born for heaven.

Election determines who shall go to heaven; redemption says from what captivity they shall ascend; and regeneration shows by what power they shall be fitted to enjoy their heavenly inheritance. They are born of God; born to read and believe the Bible; born to know their lost estate; born to experience the prevalence of iniquity; born to repent and change their conduct; born to hate themselves on account of their follies; born to return to God, like sheep that have been lost; born to pray in the Holy Ghost and by faith; yea, they sometimes cannot help praying; nor do they then need any one to drag them to the altar of their God, but they are induced to catch the flying moment to draw near to him, and tell him their feelings. Such are men of God, men of prayer,—and their names are written in heaven.

It was noted of Saul of Tarsus, who was afterwards called Paul, that *he prayed*. A spirit of prayer is a foregoing expression, and an infallible evidence of a man's being born again. With this practice the Christian begins his spiritual life, and with this he resigns his bodily life: he prays as he passes from time to eternity; he prays until he has nothing to pray for; he departs crying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Doubtless such men have a record on high — their names are written in heaven, as we have before described.

2. To those *who are called with a high, holy, and heavenly calling*. This effectual calling produces a sound conversion; for by it sinners are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Thus, when God calls his people, he calls them homewards. He is the God of all grace, who calleth us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus. As iniquity turns man away from righteousness, so effectual calling brings him home by righteousness. And whoever is turned to God is turned

from this world : it is behind him, while the kingdom of heaven is ever before him. His views and dispositions are changed ; his former books and companions become discarded ; his old novels, romances, and plays, must now be thrown aside, if, like the people of old, he do not burn them : he can no longer take delight in such trash ; but prefers, above all books, the study of the Bible, and of such books as may help him to better understand that invaluable transcript of the eternal mind of God. A man thus called to faith and repentance, and to a feeling sense of the goodness of God and the merit of Christ, is a favourite of Heaven, and is journeying thither, as one whose name is there written and acknowledged.

3. To them *that are washed in the blood, and arrayed in the obedience, of the Lord from heaven.* These are not only written in heaven ; but, as a proof of it, the influence of their interest in Christ, who is their Head in glory, is imparted through the office of the Holy Spirit ; and they become washed, arrayed, and fitted for the kingdom of God, to which they are called. Having washed their robes, by faith, in the blood of the Lamb, they therefore appear at last before the throne of God : their sins are excluded, but their persons are exalted, being *chosen in Christ, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love.** Whatever men may say against election, it is the root of all the sanctification that is in the world, and of all the holiness that the church of God will ever enjoy in the ages to come. Election in Christ has raised its objects into a gospel interest, the influence of which produces in them such love to heavenly things as nothing else could impart. How can I love my sins and my suffering Saviour too ? “ Ye that love the Lord,” said David, “ hate evil.” And we love the Lord our God because he first loved us. He that is truly holy was eternally chosen

* Eph. i. 4.

to be so ; even *every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem.*

Being washed in the precious blood of the exalted Lamb, and so cleansed from all their sins, by the application of their redemption interest through faith ; and being clothed in the spotless, imperishable, and imputed righteousness of their Surety, plainly shows that they are written in heaven, and are travelling to that high world of happiness where the inhabitants are all righteous :— their perpetual song is, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins *in his own blood*, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Now, my friends in Christ, your having put on, by faith, the justifying righteousness of our blessed Lord, fits you to enter into the glad and grateful society of the saints in light, and plainly testifies that you are going to join their company and share in their felicity ; for the garment of praise and the crown of glory are inseparably connected, and will be forever worn by the same heirs of eternal salvation, to the praise of the glory of Jehovah’s grace.

We receive our justification in that which justifies — even in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we find, according to the Scriptures, that all those persons who, by faith, have renounced their own righteousness — who have received the atonement — who have confessed the Lord Jesus Christ as the end of the law for righteousness — who enjoy him as their perfection in all true holiness, and have put him on before men accordingly, — these are they who follow him, even into heaven, for there all their names are written. What ! those that believe in *imputed* righteousness go to heaven ! Certainly ; for being thereby made righteous, they cannot be condemned, and therefore can never descend to hell. If a sinner be justified, it must be in righteousness ; but he has none of his own, therefore it must be in the righteousness of another.

And how can that become his, but by imputation? And how could the righteousness of Jesus be imputed, but on the ground of real relative union to his person, which union subsisted between him and his foreknown and chosen members from everlasting. To *impute* righteousness to a man, is to account it his by gift; hence, we read of the gift of righteousness. Christ wrought it, grace gives it, the gospel reveals it, faith receives it, the law is established by it, and the believer is justified in it. On the ground of Christ's obedience being reckoned ours, we wear it as our own, though it be not of our working; he wrought it for us, and we are to wear it to his praise: so, he made the atonement required, and we, by faith, receive it with joy in God. Thus, Christ became our substitute, and served for us; and, in consequence of his service being completed according to covenant, we obtain a full and everlasting exemption from all legal demands which stood against us by the breach of law: for he has performed all our work for us, which pertains to our discharge from the claims of the law of justification by works; and by his good works, which were perfect in quality and quantity, we are absolved from all charge of guilt for ever and ever. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, *who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*" And all such are written in heaven.

4. To them who are *the true disciples and faithful followers of the Lamb*, our text is also applicable. Disciples are believers of his doctrine and imitators of his conduct. They have learned a little, and are ever learning, under the tuition of the divine Spirit: they are taught the evil of sin; the deceitfulness of the human heart; the vanity of the world; the helplessness of man; their utterly lost condition under the immutable law of God; the necessity of the atonement of Christ, and of faith therein. In short, they are led by the Holy Com-

forter into all truth, and especially into the knowledge of Christ's person and mediation. These, in following him, are sometimes called to pass through floods of persecutions, temptations, and sorrows, for his sake. "Blessed," said Jesus, "are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:" they have their reward in heaven. Their names are written there before their persons come there. Oh what grace is this! to have our names enrolled to life above before we drew our breath!—to have been redeemed on earth, before we appeared on earth! Our salvation was bought with invaluable blood, long before we knew a tittle of the thing for ourselves. Yes, the adorable Saviour thought of us before we thought of him; he sought us before we sought him; yea, he freely gave his life a ransom for us, accursed sinners, and thereby saved us from the lowest hell, before we had any open being, and so prior to any love or obedience of ours. This is love indeed, and enough to melt a heart like adamant! Oh let us ever extol this best of friends, and sing of his bleeding love, while we have any being; and when to heaven we ascend, where our names are written, we will still repeat his praise!

5. To them *that overcome sin, Satan, and the world, through faith in Jesus's mediation, and who have received the image of the heavenly, and are meetened to enjoy the heavenly world.* The elect of God are not only predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, but they are actually begotten into a possession of it, through the interest of grace, and the exceeding great and mighty power of the eternal Spirit;—Christ is formed in their hearts, the dominion of sin is destroyed, and heaven is anticipated with a joyful hope. For they are not only justified by faith, have peace with God, and access to his gracious presence; but they rejoice in hope of the glory of God. I am now, therefore, to proceed,

THIRDLY, To notice the encouraging exhortation

given to such highly favoured persons; — *REJOICE*, because your names are written in heaven. This is matter of exultation, and is the declared foundation of happiness and triumph; and shows that a good man has a source of felicity in his gracious God, when all earthly things fail. Thrice happy man, whose record is on high, whose mansion is above, whose Father is Almighty God, and whose final inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away! ‘*Rejoice*,’ said our unerring Lord, ‘be of good cheer, your names are known and recorded in heaven.’ To whom said he this? To his newly formed disciples; to men who were sinners like us; to men who were about to go forth to preach the kingdom of God; to men who were likely to suffer all manner of reproach wrongfully for his name’s sake. Yet, though such trials lay in their way, he said, *Rejoice*.

Had he sent them out in a chariot and pair, say you, they might have rejoiced, and been pleased with the respectability of their circumstances. Nay, but they were to trudge on foot, and yet to rejoice; they were to go without a penny in their pockets, and yet rejoice. Their reward was to be in their work; and their dignifying Master so ordered it, that they went forth cheerful and prepared, with their lives in their hands, and counted it all joy that they were reckoned worthy to suffer shame for his sake. Not that we are to rejoice in the trials that may arise as our chief good, but in the Lord, who has appointed and numbered them, and determined our benefit by them. But why should the regenerate, called, and justified followers of Jesus, rejoice because their names are written in heaven?

1. On account of the permanence of their interest there. Their names cannot be erased, but their right forever remains. What an interesting consideration is this! to breathe my last with this happy thought — that the great and ancient life-book is in heaven; that it contains my

worthless name in the Lord's own hand-writing ; that the page can never be blotted ; that the testimony can never be obliterated ; and that I shall hear the great and blessed God, the Judge of all, pronounce my name at last, with blessings on my head ! "I saw the dead," said John, "small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened ; and another book was opened, which is called the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in those books." Once written in this book really, we shall never be erased. The man of God, who feels and enjoys his interest therein, is prepared to say, 'Come life or death, or the wreck of worlds, I shall be safe, confiding in the protection of the Son of God, the King of glory.' 'But where,' says the devil, 'will you be when the world is burnt ?' 'I shall be with him that burns it, but not in the burning. He will find a hiding-place for me, and reserve in heaven for me a durable heritage, which is ground for joy unspeakable and glorious.' The good man's sun shall no more go down ; his fountain of felicity shall forever flow undiminished ; a superfluous thing is never found there, nor shall one of heaven's inhabitants ever feel a want : their heaven shall ever endure.

2. They have all their sorrows here ; over them the second death hath no power : therefore, they may well *rejoice*. Death will put a final termination to all the saint's troubles ; a final parting must take place between him and his infirmities, his cares, and his sins, at the bank of Jordan. The last enemy will there take his final leave, and hard-labouring patience enter into an everlasting rest : his glimmering light will be lost in unclouded day ; and, instead of seeing through a glass darkly, he shall ever after see face to face. Is not all this matter of rejoicing ?—and the whole proceeds from our names being written in heaven.

3. Through our names being written in heaven the Divine persons and attributes are glorified in our salva-

tion. This is a foundation of rejoicing to all them that love God and desire his praise. That which glorifies God, is the spiritual man's ground of rejoicing. He admires the gospel plan of grace, because it has this tendency. This he desires to be the end of all his acts, enjoyments, and sufferings.

4. The certainty of the saint's arriving in heaven, where his name is written, affords him joy of heart. Persevering grace he prizes, and rejoices that God has promised to make him endure to the end. "Behold," said James, "we count them happy who endure." The followers of Jesus then are going to a heavenly country; and where they are written they shall arrive, and shall forever reign; for the writing can never be denied: their inheritance is there, their home is there, their hearts are there, because their God is there. Are your hearts there, my hearers? A heart that has never been carried thither, is a heart at present under the dominion of iniquity. To live without faith in Christ, is to exist without religion. To live without religion, is to live in moral darkness; which is the entrance to eternal darkness. To live in such ignorance, is to subsist without hope, like the poor heathens at Ephesus; and such men must be unprepared to die. Have ye considered that ye are mortal? Ye have heard of religion, all of you, and of religious people. Do ye consider it all a delusion? Is it, in your estimation, mere noise? There is a reality, however, in some things, which cannot wholly escape your notice. The church-yard is frequently receiving some of the once healthy and active parishioners to their last lodging in the dark and silent grave! They, who but lately walked your streets, have deserted them forever! Perhaps the doctor is now returning home, saying, 'I have left my patient, fully persuaded that he will very speedily leave this world, and become the prey of unrelenting death and the devouring grave.' These are events, the reality and certainty of

which you cannot question. Are you in the habit of anticipating this hastening and solemn change of society and of worlds? "Man dieth and giveth up the ghost; and where is he?" Where, suppose ye, are the departed spirits of many whom once ye saw beating the same path which you are still spared to tread? Heaven or hell must have received them; and all must have appeared before God! "Prepare," said the prophet, "to meet thy God, O Israel!" If I must *always be*, how proper, how reasonable is it, that I should consider *where* I must be!

Notwithstanding the seriousness of these considerations, and the undoubted certainty of death and judgment, if God had not written the names of many in heaven, none of the sinful race of Adam would have sought a dwelling there! Every one would have continued to walk *in his own way*. It is altogether owing to that sovereign election, of which we before spoke, that any of our rebellious race are snatched as brands from the burning. He, therefore, that has not impartially and attentively consulted the book of Almighty God, has not acted a just part to himself; it being the only book in the world that can claim to be read with unshaken confidence of its purity and truth. It is the only book that has endured the test of so many ages, and has fed the living hope of thousands, with meat of which the unbelieving world has no sanctifying knowledge. It has often been despised and rejected, but refutation it forever defies. It is emphatically God's book, and is given by him to us, that we may know his mind, and love his character. Therefore, examine the Bible closely; see what sentiments it contains, what conduct it requires, and what final prospects it unfolds.

This invaluable book of heaven divides the world of men into friends of God and enemies of God; to which of these two classes do you wish to belong? Which, my hearers, think ye, is the happier case, — to die in friend-

ship with God, or in league with the devil? For which is it best that I should suffer, — for the cause of Christ, or that of boundless and cursed depravity? Shall I then hear that God has chosen a people for himself; that Christ has redeemed them to himself; that the Holy Ghost is forming them for himself; that the gospel is publishing salvation for every sinner that truly desires mercy; and never spend one half-hour in considering these things; and then call myself rational, style myself an intelligent being, and boast of my profound judgment? Surely, my fellow-men, I should run the risk of being considered crazed, — at least so far as eternal things were concerned.

But, my good Christian friends, I would congratulate you here, in the *Rattling Den*, before I sit down, on the cheering prospect of quietness and rest that lies before you, which you will certainly enjoy, after the toils of your wearisome pilgrimage are ended. Exhaust not your strength in the vain pursuit of those things which cannot profit. Having the comforts of life, give thanks unto God; yea, having barely the necessaries of life, aim to be contented and grateful. In your temporal affairs, be more anxious to bring your mind to your circumstances, than to change your circumstances to your mind. By the latter a poor man may be rich; by the former a rich man may be poor. When pressed down and distressed, call religion to your aid. Having received the atonement and righteousness of the blessed Lord, as your covering from guilt and punishment, be thankful. Having professed the name of Christ, beware that ye never put it off; but hold fast the profession of your faith. Does the world offer you roses? — remember the thorns that may be concealed. Does it offer you felicity without God? — consider the disgrace that must follow. Always revere the book of your Maker, and make it the man of your counsel; pray over it, and strive to live upon its truths, and lean upon its faithful

promises ; intreating God to make you wise unto eternal salvation by it. "And be ye faithful followers of those who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises." I hope to meet you in that blessed land of repose, where the once weary pilgrims are seated at their ease, having put off their sandals, laid down their propping-staves, resigned their formerly valued wilderness-lanterns, as no more needful, and having entered into the joy of their Lord. The glory of God is the light of that blissful world, and there all the joyful inhabitants are forever contented and thankful. Let us keep this exalting end in view. Jesus went a rough way to heaven, and has left it on record, that it is enough for the servant to be as his Lord. He that suffers for Christ, and for his gospel's sake, shall rejoice ; for his name is recorded in heaven, and there is laid up for him an exceeding great reward. Oh then, love your brethren ; pray for your enemies ; pity the unreformed ; pray for the conversion of God's elect ; endeavour to caution the unwary ; strive to restore the fallen ; and practically exemplify the sacred truths which you inwardly believe. Be stedfast for the God of your lives and your mercies. Ever pray, falling at his footstool, as the least of all saints, as unworthy of his favours ; and be constantly ready to own, that you are saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ Jesus, our adorable Mediator, and highly exalted Lord and Saviour. Amen.

THE END.

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