

THE RAINBOW ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE.

A SERMON

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Preached by Mr. HAZELTON,  
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AT MOUNT ZION CHAPEL, CHADWELL STREET,
CLERKENWELL,

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*"And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto
an emerald" {Revelations. 4: 3}.*

The book out of which I have taken my text is filled with Divine mysteries, which I do not profess to be able to explain. I have invariably felt that time is the best interpreter of the unfulfilled word of God. Our God will verify His own word and fulfill every one of His predictions, just as He will fulfill all His promises, in due time. We cannot look into the future; but we know all future events and circumstances are under the management and control of infinite wisdom.

The two chapters now before us, viz., the fourth and fifth, contain certain facts which may in some measure be understood. I take it that notwithstanding the figurative character of my text, it

symbolizes and expresses very beautifully and sweetly a great and precious gospel truth.

Let me first say, that I take it that the Being that John saw sitting upon the throne here, was not the Lord Jesus Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, but God the Father; for in the following chapter we are told that there was in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written, and that eventually the Lamb went to Him and took the book out of His right hand, and that He proceeded to open the seals, and to make known its concealed contents, which were the eternal purposes and decrees of God.

Let us limit our attention for a few minutes to the words we have read, and take the text as it stands before us. We have the throne, and the how, and its position, and its appearance; and if we have time we may close with one or two remarks upon the subject.

In the first place, let me look for a few minutes at the throne indicated in our text. A door was opened in heaven, and a throne was set there, and one sat on the throne. I love the idea of a Divine throne, and I desire to carry that idea with me everywhere. I cannot afford as a poor, trembling, and exposed creature, to lose sight of the fact that my God is on the throne. I was observing that such is our state and condition here that we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that our God reigns. He holds the reins Himself, and has held them for 6000 years or thereabouts; and if the world should stand 6000

years longer, He will be found in the same position, reigning over all. Our God is interested in the preservation of the world; and especially so, in the preservation of His church on the earth. He is more deeply interested than I can describe to you, in every event that occurs, and in every circumstance that attends His people and His creatures generally. God's eye is everywhere ; and so is His power, which is omnipotent; and we have to do with this great and glorious Being, who is our covenant God, seated upon His own throne, managing the affairs of the universe, and accomplishing the deep laid purposes of His will.

Observe, in the first place, that God's reign is absolutely necessary. Imagine that our God suspended or withheld Divine influences from the world for an hour, or that He withheld the Holy Spirit and the power of His grace from His church on the earth for an hour! If God absented Himself from His church, would not hell rush into it; and if He absented Himself from the world, or withdrew His influence and suspended His government of it, would not disorder, confusion, uproar, death and destruction everywhere prevail. If our God simply raises His hand, or gives an enemy a little more rein than usual, what terribly destructive work goes on and prevails! I cannot describe the nature, properties, and power of sin. It has disorganized and deranged everything, and infused the most diabolical spirit into the human heart; and if God did not restrain its power and operations, the world would become an Aceldama. As it is, there is much confusion and destruction continually raging; but God keeps His eye

upon every movement, and never loses sight of one fiend, "Fiend, sir." Yes, fiends; call them evil spirits if you will, God never ceases to watch the enemy, nor the motions of enmity in the hearts of creatures, and,

*"His eternal thought moves on,
His undisturbed affairs."*

His moral government is absolutely necessary. God is a moral Governor, and will never cease to be so; and He is perfect in this respect. Looking at His moral government in connection with the mediation of your dear Lord, we have a very vivid representation of its immutability, spirituality, and infinite depth; and also of the fact, that God as the Divine Lawgiver cannot change. We live in a very evil day, as to the atonement of Christ. It is ignored, cast down, trampled upon; and some professors are so profoundly wicked, that they can and do sneer at the idea and fact of an atonement for sin by the shedding of the blood of Immanuel. Our God is a righteous Ruler, and will uphold and honor His moral glory, in spite of all the powers of darkness; therefore He would not and could not take sinners to heaven apart from the mediation of His Son. If you desire to see the moral grandeur of God, and the extent and power of His law, go to Gethsemane and to Calvary, and read the fact that the justice of God is inflexible and unchangeable in a suffering Christ, in the garden and on the cross. He that sweat great drops of blood was God incarnate; and what fell upon Him then, you and I shall never fully know, for it can never be measured. It was the wrath of God, and the punishment

due to sin inflicted by His insulted justice. The bitter cup that was pressed to His lips was mixed by God, who was angry with sin, but who loved the sinner, and who because He could not otherwise consistently with Himself, save sinners, sent His Son and smote Him. Jesus fell beneath the weight of our guilt, and emptied the cup of wrath Divine, Yes, the moral government of our God is a fact.

Look at God's government in providence, and rejoice in the fact that He reigns everywhere; therefore,

*"My life's minutest circumstance
Is subject to His eye."*

Five sparrows are so insignificant that they are sold for two farthings, yet one of them cannot fall to the ground without our heavenly Father. "Some people," it was said the other day sneeringly, "believe that everything is arranged by God, and falls somewhere under the appointments of Jehovah." I am one of the men who believe in this; our God presides over the whole system of providence, over all risings and fallings, over all that is straight, and all that is crooked; over all that is pleasant, and all that is painful; over all that lasts a few weeks or months, and all that suddenly occurs and rapidly passes away. All is managed and controlled by Him who sits upon the throne, which was and is surrounded by the rainbow. A throne was set in heaven, and one sat upon the throne. Watch the operations of providence, and do not forget that the hand of God is always connected with them all. Chance and fortune have no

existence anywhere in Divine providence. Our God's great mind superintends the whole, and His skillfully working hand manages and overrules all from first to last. All would otherwise be disorder and confusion. I repeat what I have often said, there would be no orderly or blessed connection between one day and another, and no consecutive and important connection between one event and another, if God Himself did not preside over the whole system. The great wheel of Divine providence has a ring so high that it is dreadful, and it is full of eyes, for there is no ignorance whatever connected with this work of God, who turns and guides the whole. He never allows another hand to hold the helm, or to direct a single motion. Our God is supreme, and will be everywhere and do what He pleases, and being everywhere and doing what He pleases; He is accomplishing the purposes of His will, and is saving sinners like you and me. God's providential reign is necessary.

But what shall we say about His spiritual reign? What is the character of the throne He sits upon? It is a throne, denoting the fact that His authority is supreme, and that He will never surrender it to another; but it is a throne of grace, as well as a throne of government. Let us come boldly to it, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. If God in one respect, sits on that throne, and manages the affairs of all worlds, in another respect, there flows perpetually from His heart a river of water of life which indicates the riches of His saving grace. Bless our God, His throne is approachable. John was not far from it, the twenty-four elders and the

four beasts were near to it. By the four-and-twenty elders I understand the heads or representatives of the whole church of God under the Old Testament and the New. They are near the throne, for God is approachable, and the rainbow of the covenant is perpetually visible. They are worshippers, hence they have harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints. Sometimes they pour out their hearts in prayer before God, for their souls swell and contract and they are burdened and distressed; and sometimes they are greatly favored, and having harps they sing the worthy praises of God and the Lamb. Thus our life is made up of prayer and praise, sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure, nights and days. Let us pray in the night, and not be cast down; and we will sing in the day when the Sun of Righteousness shines. Let us bless our God for any measure of joy, and when it is His pleasure to bring events to pass so as to fill us with sorrow and pain, may it be ours to look at the covenant bow, and accept His will as Divinely good. A throne is set in heaven, for God's reign is necessary. His reign is also internal and experimental for God dwells in the heart. It is our mercy, my brethren, that He reigns over every heart, if He does not reign in everyone in an experimental and spiritual manner. There is, therefore, no heart in this world that can do what it would. The heart of the wicked, the heart of Popery, the heart of Mahomedanism, and the hearts of Satan and his angels, are all under the reign of our God, who checks and restrains them as He pleases; but He reigns in a special, saving, and spiritual manner in the hearts of His dear people. And is it not sweet, precious and fertilizing to feel the reign of God's grace ? Time

then glides away very agreeably, and the troubles of life are not then magnified, but they are minified, and become less and less, and we become patient and sing—

*"I can do all things, or can bear
All sufferings, if my Lord be there."*

Do not talk about a religion that has little or nothing to do with the heart; do not talk about grace that does not reign in the soul, subduing sin, and that does not sometimes produce a holy state of things within. We are not quite strangers to heaven, nor to the joys of that celestial world. A drop of honey reaches us now and then, or a drop of holy unction falls occasionally upon one's heart. Then all is composed and tranquil, for all becomes calm and serene when God by His grace is felt to reign over all that we are the subjects of. The internal reign of God is necessary.

Notice in the next place, that God's reign is universal. "His dominion ruleth over all." I do not trouble myself now concerning the stars and heavenly bodies as to whether they are worlds or not. I do not know what they are; in the Bible they are called stars, and in one or two places we read of Him that made the worlds: "By whom also He made the worlds." Well, whether they be worlds or not, they are ruled by God, all being His creatures. And if, as we are told, there are thousands upon thousands of them, then with all my heart, I believe they all belong to God: "He bringeth out their host by number; He

calleth them all by their names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one faileth." And the reign of God in distant worlds, is as necessary there as here. But we have now to do more especially with three worlds, with earth, hell and heaven. There is a world worse than this, which is hell, and we trust we have been saved for ever from that. There is a better world than this, even heaven, a place prepared for saints, the residence of our dear Lord, and the inheritance of the saints, and we have to do with that world and also with God the King thereof.

We have, however, to do at present with this world, and very much to do with it too. It is not all bad here, and it is not all good. There is here a large measure of that which is evil and hellish; but there is also, thank God, a measure of that which is heavenly. Sin rages here, and grace prevails here and there. It is a middle world between the other two, managed and controlled by God. It is connected with heaven by Jacob's antitypical ladder; and it is connected with hell also, alas! By a broken law and sin. If we are saved, our faces have been turned towards Zion, and we are going to that blessed place. But our Lord reigns over all the nations of the world, which mystery I cannot explain. What darkness, superstition, cruelty, and diabolical evil prevail in many of the nations of the earth! But we will leave this mystery for the present where it is. There is a throne, and One sits upon it; and all the nations of the earth are beneath His eye, and under His dominion. God reigns over worlds and nations, over cities and over villages; and I have known and still

know some villages in our favored land which have been graciously blessed for years. You may go into some provincial towns and not find the gospel of God's free grace, but there are villages here, in which stand sanctuaries, and where the pure gospel of the grace of God is sweetly preached. But,

*"All shall come, and last, and end,
As shall please our heavenly Friend."*

Well, His throne is approachable, and His reign is universal.

God's reign is gracious and everlasting. His throne will never be empty. Our good Queen has been seated on her throne for fifty years; but it must be left, for earthly monarchs are mortal, notwithstanding their grandeur, majesty, and glory; and the throne of England will be empty some day, so far as its present occupant is concerned. "And what are your feelings about it?" Why, God save the Queen! I can and do go as far as that, for I am loyal. Well, though the throne of England be empty, yet your royal Father will never die, nor be unseated, nor vacate His high seat of Divine and heavenly honor. "His dominion ruleth over all," and His kingdom shall stand for ever and ever. The purposes and decrees of God are both barriers and outlets. They are barriers, for He says concerning every enemy and every hostile power, Thus far mayest thou come, and no further ; and here shall thy rage and power be stayed. Popery would rule the country, and the world, if it might and could; but there is a point

beyond which its power cannot go. Whatever Mahomedanism may now be, there was a time, many centuries ago, when the false prophet would have prevailed over all the nations of the earth, if he might and could; but there was a point beyond which he could not go. And there are persons and systems in existence now which would swamp, drown and annihilate the great principles of Divine and eternal truth if they could; but there is a point beyond which they cannot go. Reading recently a paper concerning the Jubilee, the writer rejoiced in a good many things, regarding the fact that many great and important changes had taken place during the last fifty years ; and one thing in which he rejoiced was the removal of Calvinism from the Church of England, and in a great measure from the professing church altogether. He was so strangely out of order (not to use a harsher word,) that he said, that by the departure of Calvinism, life has been made sweeter, and the sting of death has been taken away. Only think, that the removal of Calvinism destroys the sting of death! That spirit, my friend, would cover the world, and drown the professing church if it might and could; but the God of truth is on His throne, and nothing can go beyond the barriers of which I am speaking. But if Divine decrees are barriers on the one hand, they are outlets on the other. The waves of opposition dash against the decrees of God, but they go no further. Through these decrees on the other hand, there flows the river of peace and grace, and truth and love, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. I do not wonder at John being in an ecstasy when he saw this. "And I was in the spirit, and heard a voice saying, Come hither, and I will show thee things

which must be done hereafter." That is all I will say on this point. I am afraid I have taken too much time on this branch of our subject this morning.

In the second place, a word on the bow. "And there was a rainbow round about the throne." Not a military bow, not a weapon of war, not a bow with an arrow in it, and arrows did not appear lying upon the throne of Him that sat in the midst of the bow; but a rainbow, a sign of peace, a symbol of reconciliation, the covenant of grace was round about the throne. God said to Noah, "Behold, I do set My bow in the cloud." It is God's bow. The natural rainbow is His, and the mystical or spiritual rainbow of the covenant is also His. Just as the creature has not, and never had, the slightest hand in producing the natural rainbow, so neither has the creature the slightest hand in producing, arranging, or securing to himself the blessings of the covenant of grace. The natural rainbow is God's creature, both beautiful and grand, and it indicates the greater grandeur of its Creator. Well, as that is God's own work, and no hands but His made it, so this is God's eternal covenant with His well beloved Son, concerning the thousands and thousands that shall for ever be before His throne. Not to go into the matter naturally, how is this rainbow formed? We know that the natural rainbow is composed of various colors marvelously blended, and united very beautifully to one another. You cannot tell where one color ends and another begins. Each color, however, is visible, and the whole seven are essential to the perfection of the bow. How is the bow of the covenant formed?

With all the promises of God, and His great oath running through them all. All the blessings of the covenant, and the grace of all blended in a Divinely beautiful and glorious manner, with all the attributes of God, omnipotence, love, wisdom, grace, mercy, peace, truth, and eternity. All the perfections of God are blended wonderfully and gloriously in the covenant of His grace, by virtue of what our great Head is and has done. As there can be no natural rainbow without the sun and rain, or a watery cloud; so neither can there be any spiritual rainbow without the presence and the glory of the great Sun of Righteousness in heaven. Our dear Lord has done His work, and what work was that? The deluge in Noah's time drowned the world, and the deluge of divine wrath fell on Christ, and He bore it all, and now God says, sitting on the throne, "For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with Thee nor rebuke Thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from Thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on Thee." Hence, there is the bow : the deluge having fallen upon Jesus, and passed away for ever, God sitting on the throne says, Now I do set my bow here, Christ the glorious Sun is risen, the once suffering Son of God is ascended to heaven there to, shine for ever. And this forms the bow of the everlasting covenant, by which God resolves to do you good for ever. There was a rainbow round about the throne: this bow can never be broken.

I like the idea of Dr. Goodwin, for I am a lover of Puritans, notwithstanding all that is said against Calvinism. Goodwin, Owen, and such great and good men I dearly love. Dr. Goodwin says, "You are not to suppose that the bow appeared like a half-moon or semi-circle, like the ordinary rainbow, but that it surrounded and encircled the throne, for it was round about it, in sight unto an emerald." Why, that is such a rainbow as never was seen before! It is so, and the covenant of grace is unique; indeed, there is nothing like it, the rainbow of the covenant round about the throne. Will there ever be a storm there? No, God has sworn that he will not be wroth with us, nor rebuke us. No, the rainbow will never be removed, a breakage will never occur in it, and an opening will never happen; it is fixed round about the throne, and the covenant of grace will stand for ever.

Thirdly, its position round about the throne. Visible, fixed in its position, and never varying. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My mouth." It was visible to all alike. The natural rainbow is so ; it is not formed for private individuals, or to be seen privately merely, it is for the world to look at, and millions may and can see it, when it appears in the heavens ; and all the church of God are favored with a sight of this bow. Brother and sister, when you go to the throne to pray, look at the bow, it is always there, it is your privilege that God is a covenant God to you. Do not forget the bow, it is roundabout the throne, visible to all. Round about, so that in whatever way God comes to you, He comes as your covenant God, whatever He sends to you comes through the covenant bow and is a

covenant gift, whether it be divine chastisement, divine direction, or a measure of divine honey. And if you go to God in prayer you are heard, because you are loved with covenant love, and your prayers ascend to heaven and are answered in accordance with the covenant arrangements and promises of God. Round about. On the right hand the bow appears, on the left it is seen, before and behind it is the same; and as to past, present, and future, the bow or covenant of grace surrounds all.

The appearance of the bow. "In sight like unto an emerald." Green is the prevailing color of the natural rainbow, and the emerald is a green precious stone. How shall we spiritualize this? I do not care much for spiritualizing; God's covenant is always fresh, always new, always agreeable to the eye. Perhaps it appeared like an emerald to indicate the fact that as green is probably the color which is most suited and agreeable to the human eye, so the covenant of grace is said to be like an emerald, because it is always agreeable, attractive, and acceptable to the true believer. What grandeur and what grace are here! What majesty appears in the ordinary bow, and what majesty and grandeur shine in God's covenant bow! What grace as well as grandeur is there, even about the throne! "I will not be wroth thee," come and "call upon Me in the day of trouble." But I have contracted guilt. "I will not be wroth with thee." I am suffering from the fact that I have fallen into trouble. "I will not be wroth with thee." Come and tell Me all, for I wait to be gracious. "Him that cometh I will in no wise cast out." So that we have the coming of the trembling,

burdened, broken-hearted sinner, and God inviting him near. And notwithstanding the fears of that sinner God says, "I am not angry, fury is not in Me: I look at the bow, the promise I have given, and the covenant I have formed with My dear Son on your behalf. Come, therefore, and open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."

As for the remarks, I think I must leave them, except that I will just say that clouds and darkness are round about Him. Do you say I had forgotten that text? No, I have not. "Behold, I do set my bow in the cloud, and I will look upon it; "therefore, if clouds and darkness are round about Him, the bow of the covenant is there also, and may be seen in the cloud by a living and strong faith. Another thought strikes me. Great troubles were to follow, and did follow, as we read in this book; but all that followed was preceded by this marvelous arrangement for the comfort of John and of the church. There is the throne, and our God upon it and the rainbow of the covenant is round about it. There are the elders, and the four beasts before the throne, in peace and safety with God; so that all that subsequently happened was ordered, arranged, connected together, or permitted by the covenant love and wisdom of our gracious covenant God. And as Kent sings:

*"Here, when thy fears begin to rise,
And hope in disappointment dies;
This cov'nant bow thy fears shall quell,
'Twas made for thee in all things well.'**

May the Lord add His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.