

THE BEST WISDOM.

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 unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." {Job 28: 28}.

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Nature can never rise above its own level, and the things of grace and eternal life and salvation are spiritual things, and as such cannot be understood or comprehended by the natural man. Hence the necessity for the work of God the Spirit. "A new heart," the Lord says, "will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." The Lord has promised to impart grace and spiritual fear to the hearts of sinners. When therefore one has been constituted a spiritual character, "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." He is blessed with new light and life. Other objects are discovered to him by the eternal Spirit, such as the natural man never saw, and he occupies a position which is entirely

spiritual. Hence the serious errors and mistakes which are made by natural persons concerning the character of God, His holy law, spiritual things, the covenant of grace, and the glorious gospel of the blessed God. There is a life in a spiritual man so mysterious that the natural man cannot comprehend him; for all that are in Christ Jesus are new creatures. Hence in this chapter out of which the text this morning is taken, we have a threefold view of wisdom. Job was led first to speak of natural knowledge or wisdom, and, secondly, of the wisdom of God in the operations of Divine Providence, and in the text of that wisdom which is from above, and which is inseparable from salvation. In the former part of the chapter he speaks of that natural knowledge and wisdom which miners have displayed. "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold, where they fine it; iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone." But if you will read the chapter at your leisure, you will perceive that Job here is speaking of the knowledge and wisdom displayed in going down into the bowels of the earth, and obtaining there from the hidden riches of nature. That wisdom, however, is not saving; for man may know much about the surface and interior of the earth, and yet be destitute of the one thing needful; and therefore a most important question is asked in the 12th verse: "But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? The depth saith, It is not in me, and the sea saith, It is not with me." Heavenly wisdom is a boon so precious and so great, "that it cannot be gotten for gold for it has often turned out that the richest men have been destitute of this grace. Wisdom is not a purchasable blessing for it cannot be obtained for gold and silver, neither is it to be acquired by human power, and it is so rich and great that it can never be merited ; and therefore, " Where shall

wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" Job, having contemplated the depth and the sea, soars as it were into the clouds, and says, "God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. For He looketh to the ends of the earth and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and He weigheth the waters by measure." Wonderful words, and very wonderful are the facts they indicate. The clouds hanging over our heads are filled, so to speak, with thousands of tons of water, and yet they are upheld by an unseen Hand, and when it is needed they pour their contents upon the earth by the will of an unseen Being. Surely we have got at the best wisdom now and it is unnecessary to rise higher! The visible clouds and the aerial heavens where God's greatness and wisdom are so conspicuous, surely teach us all the wisdom we need, and studying God in these wondrous operations must surely be the highest wisdom! No, "Unto man he saith, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." The natural man, to repeat what I commenced with, knoweth not the things of the Spirit, because they are spiritually discerned. A person may soar to the clouds, and give us their dimensions and even the weight of water which they contain, and yet be ignorant of God, and have no knowledge of himself as a sinner, nor of the Way of Life, and no desire to be found therein. Therefore, He said unto man, "Behold the fear of the Lord that is wisdom."

"The Lord said unto man." Some have supposed that Job refers to Adam; that the Lord said unto him, when he was in a state of innocence, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding and thus gave him the law, which is holy, just and good. Is not this taking too limited a view of the verse? Should it be confined to the

first man? Does he not speak thus to every man, and if to every man, then to every descendant of Adam, "Behold the fear of the Lord that is wisdom," and therefore, he that is destitute of this fear has not begun to be wise; for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that keep His commandments." I suppose those truths would be offensive to the minds of the learned, the philosophical and the intellectual, and hearing them from us they would contemptuously set us down as so many ignorant beings; but, Christian friends, I trust I am right in saying we know something about the importance and the nature of spiritual things. Let them sneer, contemn, and condemn and if permitted let them persecute, which may the Lord prevent, if it please Him. One thing is needful, and that through mercy we possess. Though the natural man knows us not, we know him; though he knows not the position we occupy, we know where he stands; and although he is a stranger to that experience with which we are blest, we are not altogether strangers to his spirit; for once, like him, we were dead in trespasses and sins.

Looking at our text this morning, I shall make a few observations upon certain points which lie upon its surface; but, having on recent occasions directed your attention to the nature and operations of the fear of God, I shall not now tarry on that point. "Unto man He saith, The fear of the Lord that is wisdom." I notice that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, because it invariably leads its possessors into a safe state. Surely the man that knows where to go to be safe for ever is a wise man, and not a fool. All that fear God are certainly wise unto salvation, and to be wise in this respect is to possess the richest and best wisdom under the heavens. The persons that are wise unto salvation may not know many other things ; indeed, there

have been thousands of God's dear people in the world wending their way to heaven, who have scarcely been able to read the letter of Divine truth. As for philosophy, they never knew the meaning of the word; as for philosophers, they never knew who or what they were; and as for science, they never understood or desired to understand it. The way of the Lord, however, is so plain, and straight, and clear, that a way-faring man, though a fool in other respects, shall not err therein. I may go to heaven without the slightest knowledge of scientific matters; but I cannot go there without the wisdom which cometh from above. Heaven is reached by many who never possessed great intellectual powers. One whose mind, indeed, actively considered is very feeble and limited in its operations, may yet be found in the way of life, and obtain heaven after all, but he can never reach those scenes of eternal bliss and glory unless he is blessed with light from the throne of God and the Lamb; therefore "Unto man He saith, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." It is so because it always leads its possessor into a state of safety. Now do you know what it is, my dear friends, to hide yourself in the glorious person of the Mediator? There is safety there. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished." You remember the time when your eyes were first opened, and you discovered yourselves to be lost and ruined sinners, and saw no signs of safety anywhere. You looked upwards, and saw nothing but the anger and curse of God; you looked downwards, and saw nothing but hell and ruin; you looked behind and saw nothing but a life of sin, which rose up in judgment against you; and before you was nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. There was no safety anywhere. At length the Son of God, the glorious Mediator between God

and man, was discovered to you, and you were enabled to flee for refuge to the hope set before poor sinners; and if you did not flee to your own satisfaction, yet you did flee; and if you have not yet confidently entered into that hiding-place, yet you desire to be there; and let me again assure you that you are really in God's sight where and what you desire to be. If you desire with all your soul to be found in Jesus, you are in Him. God finds you there, Satan shall find you there, Justice shall find you there, death shall find you there, and the troubles and changes of life shall find you there. Well, this is your desire, and I am now speaking to the little ones; you desire to be "found in Him, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Sink or swim, you feel you must abide here; and whether you be cursed or blessed, you must try to remain on this high and solemn, and sacred ground. If you perish, you are resolved to perish at the feet of the dear and blest Redeemer. Well, you are a wise man or woman; I cannot make you believe it, but the fear of God is before your eyes and in your hearts, and it has induced you to flee for refuge to the only hope set before you. You are safe from all danger. O that the Holy Ghost would apply the fact to your hearts and make it your own! You are safe in this rock, in this Christ, and under this shadow. If you are resting here, you are safe with regard to the past. Adam's imputed guilt is gone, and you are safe with regard to that. You are safe with regard to your own sins; they have been pardoned and forgiven. You are safe with regard to the future; for being in Christ, saints are as secure as angels in heaven, for there are no degrees of safety in the spiritual and gracious government of our God. Safe you will be to-morrow, whether you live or die, and safe you will be next

year, whether you be in England or Australia, on the earth or in heaven. Safety is of the Lord; and you are with Him, and in Him; for the fear of God has induced you to flee for refuge to Jesus Christ, the sinner's hope and Friend. "Unto man He saith, The fear of the Lord that is wisdom;" for it leads its possessor to flee to the only hiding-place God has prepared for guilty, ruined sinners. Are the dangers visible, or invisible? (and the invisible are far more numerous than those that can be seen,) it matters not whether they be visible or invisible, near or distant, great or small, physical or spiritual,—

*"On Christ, the solid Rook, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."*

And there you are safe for heaven. Oh what a precious power then, is godly fear, if it leads its possessor to flee to this great hiding-place.

Such persons are said to be wise unto salvation. One word here, before I dismiss this point. Timothy was thus addressed by Paul: "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." This most important fact is to some extent lost sight of in the day in which we live ; that the Scriptures, the Word of God, the revelation of heaven were never intended to teach man science, or philosophy, or politics, or astronomy, or any other branch of secular knowledge. They were designed by the God who gave the Word to teach men spiritual and eternal matters. The Holy Ghost comes not to teach men science, nor to instruct them in natural things, but to lead the mind into the things that relate to the kingdom of God, of Christ, and of heaven, things which cannot be learned at school, or acquired by nature's powers, and which are in all respects the simple and pure gift of God, the free outflow of

His loving heart to His dear people. If you do not know even the meaning of the word science, yet you know Christ. If you do not know what philosophy is, yet you know the Lord, which is better; for you are wise unto salvation. As to politics, you may hardly know whether you are a Conservative or a Liberal, or anything else; but you are wise unto salvation. As to what party might be best in power, probably you do not know, and do not trouble yourself concerning the question; but you love the House of God, you hold converse with the God of heaven, Christ and you are one, and you shall one day see His face,

*“And never, never sin,
And from the rivers of His grace,
Drink endless pleasures in.”*

Oh you are wiser than the most intellectual natural man that ever lived. You might have all the knowledge of Newton, and all the poetry of Milton, and all the powers of the great and learned,—and let me speak it with reverence and solemnity,—be lost at last. But you have the fear of God in your heart, you have been made wise unto salvation ; for you know yourselves as guilty sinners, lost and ruined, and you know you are interested in the Saviour; and this is the wisdom which cometh down from above, even the fear of the Lord. Now these wise persons commit their all into the hands of Christ, and Paul was wise in this respect, and some of my hearers possess a measure of the same wisdom. “I know,” said that great man, “whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” And what had Paul committed unto Him, but his everlasting all? He felt that he could not keep, save, exalt, protect or preserve himself, and that was a feeling which arose from that

heavenly wisdom, which sprang from the fear of God in his heart. He feared God, and that fact made him wise, and his wisdom induced him to gather together all that was dear to himself, both mortal and immortal, his body and soul, for life and for death, and he went to Jesus and committed all into His hands. If you and I have been led to commit our immortal souls into the hands of this risen and reigning Saviour, we are as safe as Paul was, and may say with him, "I know whom I have believed;" not "in whom but "I know whom I have believed and I am calm and serene because His hands are strong to keep what I have put into them, His character is untarnished and untarnishable, and because He was never known to fail. I have such a knowledge of that dear Friend unto whom I have committed my all, that,

*"My steady soul shall fear no more
Than solid rocks when billows roar."*

Oh am I safe in Jesus? Is it a fact that I am in this great hiding-place, under the shadow of this blessed Rock? Yes, the fear of God has made me wise to run away from myself, to leave the world behind, and to commit my all to the great and glorious Son of God. To creep beneath the wings of Jehovah, is the part of wisdom. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." "Under His wings shalt thou trust." I do not mind whether take you "wings" there to indicate those of the cherubim on the mercy-seat, or the wings of a fowl. We are not hiding under the wings of an army, and not under the wings of the cherubim merely; but under the perfections, and purposes, and providence of the Lord our God.

*“Just as a lion protects her brood
From birds of prey, which seek their blood,
Under her feathers, so the Lord
Makes His own arm His people’s guard.”*

London people, or perhaps, many of them, are not well acquainted with the habits of fowls; but if a kite or a hawk appears over the brood the hen calls in a very peculiar manner, and the young ones at once run towards her. She sees the danger, and calls them, and they run and creep beneath her wings, and are all concealed there. Our God sees our danger, and speaks to us in a peculiar manner in His invitations and His promises; and having implanted godly fear in our hearts, and so caused us to hate sin, and to distrust ourselves; when He calls, we run and creep beneath the wings of His power, providence, and grace. The fear of the Lord leads us to Him, and the wisdom that springs out of that fear leads us to creep beneath His shadow. This proceeding on the part of the brood is not forced, but quite natural; and it is not forced work on the part of the sinner that he flies to God for refuge.

*“I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.*

*“But if I die, with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
That were to die—delightful thought!
As sinner never died.”*

Therefore, O God, I am come to put my trust under the shadow of Thy wings. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Now such persons can never be lost; and the principle of godly fear in the heart can never be destroyed. "I will put my fear into their hearts, and they shall not depart from Me and my fear will bring them from the world, and from sin, and from themselves into My presence, and induce them to hide under My shadow, and they shall there abide. I remember when I was sixteen years of age, and joined the church, a number of persons who were employed on the same premises, partly owing perhaps to the fact that I was a mere boy, sneered very much, especially when it became known that I had been baptized. I had many doubts and fears respecting the future, and I think I did most earnestly and fervently pray that God would keep me, and never permit me to bring a blot or reproach upon His holy cause.

*"I have been upheld till now,
Who could hold me up but Thou?"*

The fear of the Lord never leaves its possessor to trust in himself; but it induces him to come out of self, and enter into this place of safety. This is all I have time to say on this point. The fear of the Lord is wisdom, because it leads into the place of divine safety.

In the second place, it is wisdom because it leads its possessor into peace—not only into safety, but into peace. Is it a blessing to know God? That person, whoever he may be, and whatever he may know, is a stranger to safety and peace, who is ignorant of Him. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Let me be in the dark concerning God, and I am not safe or tranquil, or secure; but if I know God, and the relation in which I

stand to Him—"Ah that is it, Sir!" Yes, I know: but let us go on gradually; if I know Him, and the relation in which I stand to Him, and that the great God of heaven is my God, my Father, and my Friend, then I am wise unto salvation; and possessing such a knowledge I have a good hope within, and a peace, such as the world can neither give nor take away. The fear of God in operation, and pervading the whole mind destroys all tormenting fear. At times we have many fears which are not godly, but this fear in vigorous operation overcomes them all. The fear of man brings a snare, but the fear of God never does. I venture to say there is no one in the house of God who better understands this than the preacher. I have been sorely tried by the fear of man hundreds of times, and well do I know that it is a snare ; but if the fear of God prevails in my mind, and holds all my faculties and powers, then I do not mind who may be present to listen to me; places, persons, circumstances and scenes, all fade into comparative insignificance before the fear and love of God. In this respect, therefore, the fear of God is wisdom. Then there is the future; and one says, "I have a large family and small means, and I am deeply tried about the future." May the Lord increase this grace in your heart, and in mine too. I am not one to flog you because you disturb yourselves as to the future. Many do so sometimes. May the Lord give us more grace, and increase His own fear in our hearts; for so shall we be enabled to leave the future where it is, even in His hands, and have no carking care whatever about it. The fear of the Lord brings its possessor to rest in God as to the morrow, and He that rests in God is wise. Then there is the fear of death, for, in some respects, it is an enemy. Perhaps it is not sinful to shrink from death, for God has created the love of life in us, or implanted that sentiment in our very nature, and,

therefore, its existence cannot be wrong. "But Sir, there is something that triumphs over death." Just so, but there is only one thing that can enable us to do this, and that is the fear of God. Let me know that my sins are pardoned, that my soul is one with Jesus, that I am in Him ; let me read my title clear to mansions in the skies, and let me be filled with a sense of the greatness of God's love to my soul, and I am not afraid to die; the fear of death is then carried away, and I have confidence in relation to death and to eternity. Yes, this fear is wisdom, because it destroys all other fears in its possessors' hearts.

Now from this it appears that the fear of God is quite consistent with courage. We fear God without being afraid of Him, and those who have had most of this fear in their hearts have been the most courageous characters. " So did not I," and Nehemiah is referring to a certain course of conduct which had been taken by Jews, and speaking of himself, he says,—“So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.” I also should have done as they did, but for the fear of God.” What was it that kept Joseph? “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.” Was it not the part of wisdom in Joseph to act as he did? And it was godly fear that shaped his conduct on that occasion. To depart from evil, that is understanding. But there are degrees of godly fear, and I have often thought of Obadiah. Mysterious are the operations of Divine Providence, and the reign of grace. Obadiah was governor of Ahab's house. Perhaps a worse man than Ahab, or a better man than Obadiah never lived; for of Obadiah, it is said that he feared the Lord greatly. I wonder why Ahab had such a man in his house, and why he so exalted him as to make him governor of his household. The wicked sometimes see something in the just that is commendable, and this may

have led Ahab to confide and trust in him. Obadiah feared the Lord greatly, and that fear induced him to conduct himself wisely in that wicked court. And then it is said again in Nehemiah, concerning Hananiah, ruler of the palace, that he "feared the Lord above many." Thus we have Joseph fearing the Lord, and fleeing from evil, and Nehemiah, stern, and courageous, and bold, saying, " So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord; and I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from His house and Obadiah, who feared the Lord greatly, and Hananiah, who feared the Lord above many. To fear the Lord that is wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding. Dear friends, there is peace here, because godly fear leads the soul to rest where God Himself rests and is pleased. To rest where God's perfections are all in harmony, where all is tranquility, even in the atonement of Jesus Christ. Godly fear brings its possessor to the atonement, there God is found, and He and sinners are sweetly reconciled. Thus the fear of the Lord, said God to man, that s wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

My time is gone, or I had some other points to mention; for instance, I intended to look at the subject in connection with the circumstances of our life, and with the world, and with the future. It is a good thing to be well prepared for the future; and he who well provides and prepares for it (and I speak of natural things now), is sometimes said to be a wise man. Well, you may apply this to the things of God. Lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come. The future with regard to all its circumstances,—are you prepared for that? Yes, I fear God, and He will provide. I am satisfied, and I leave myself, and my affairs in His hands. He has provided, and He will provide. Then there is death. "Prepare to meet

thy God, O Israel." They that are prepared for this are wise. Are you washed in the Saviour's blood, and clothed in His righteousness? Are you filled with His grace, and led by His Spirit? If you are thus prepared to meet God, you are wise; to meet Him in death; to meet Him in heaven; to meet Him on the judgment day. Prepared to hear the last trumpet sound; prepared to rise from the grave ; prepared to fix your eyes upon your descending Lord ; prepared to be caught up to meet Him in the air, and prepared to be for ever with the Lord. To man He said, " The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil,—the evil of error, the evil of sin, the evil of the world, and the evil world itself, and the evil one,—is understanding." Some people are for going as near to the danger as possible. God says it is understanding to depart from it. Yonder is an Atheist, and he is very clever, if you can keep out of his way do so, for the serpent is more subtle than any other beast of the field. If you feel your feebleness and inability to cope with the evil, depart from it, for to do so is understanding. The Lord add His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.