

TAUGHT THAT WE MAY TEACH NO. 1578

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“And the man said unto me,
Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears,
and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee;
for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither:
declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel.”*
Ezekiel 40:4

WE learn from this text something concerning Ezekiel himself. He was certainly one of the greatest of the prophets. His visions remind us of those of John, both for their brightness, splendor, and number—and yet this eminent prophet was, nevertheless, styled, “son of man.” He is continually called by that name.

The title is used over and over again throughout the book of his prophecies—“Son of man”—to remind him that even the seer, the prophet, the inspired, the man who was indulged with vision upon vision—was still only a man. The best of men are men at the best. Those eyes that are strengthened to behold the cherubim, and to gaze upon the stupendous wheels of providence, are still only the eyes of a son of man.

The title was used to teach him humility, and also to remind him of the condescension of God towards him, and to fill him with awe and wonder that he should be chosen from the rest of mankind, though no more than they, to see such wondrous sights, withheld from other eyes.

To us this wears a very promising aspect, for if God can reveal Himself to one “son of man,” why not to another? And if God can speak, as He did speak, so wonderfully through Ezekiel, one son of man, why not through you? Why not through me? For we, too, are sons of men. We have no worthiness or fitness, neither does Ezekiel claim any. He is reminded of his descent—he is still one of the sons of men.

Oh, be of good comfort, you who think that God can never use you—you who are poor in spirit, and wish to serve Him, but deeply feel your own insignificance. Remember that God is able to do for you exceedingly abundantly above what you ask or even think. He can yet reveal His Son in you, and Himself to you, and by you, after such methods as you have never dreamed of.

And possibly, the painful experience through which you are passing even now may be preparing you to stand upon yet loftier mounts, and to behold visions of God, which in happier days you shall tell out to the house of Israel, by which multitudes shall be blessed through you.

This is our present subject—we will speak upon *the manifestations with which God favors certain of His servants*. Then, secondly, we will dwell upon *their responsibility while they are enjoying such manifestations*—they are bound to behold with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and set their heart upon all that God shall show them.

And then, thirdly, we will speak upon *the object which God has in giving these manifestations to His more favored people*. It is that they may declare all that they see, that the whole house of Israel may, as it were, see by these favored eyes, and hear by these chosen ears, and may set their hearts upon the Word of the Lord because another has first done so.

I. First, I shall have a little to say upon **THE MANIFESTATIONS WITH WHICH CERTAIN OF GOD’S SERVANTS ARE FAVORED.**

The Lord Jesus Christ does draws near in a very special manner to some of His people. He did to Ezekiel, for I take it that the man mentioned in the chapter, whose appearance was like the appearance of

brass, is none other than our divine Lord, who, though a man, yet exceeds all men in the brightness of His wondrous person. It was He, doubtless, who appeared to Ezekiel. Long before Christ came on earth to die, He appeared to His servants in different ways.

He sojourned with Abraham as a wayfarer, for such He found the patriarch to be. He wrestled with Jacob at the brook Jabbok, for Jacob was wrestling with a sore trial. It was He that revealed Himself to Moses when the bush was burning, and it was He that stood by Joshua's side as the man having a drawn sword in His hand.

In divers ways and forms He proved that His delights were with the sons of men. Or ever the Word appeared in actual flesh and blood, He communed here and there with His chosen servants. He will show Himself to any of you who seek Him. He will unveil the beauties of His face to every eye that is ready to behold them. There is never a heart that loves Him but He will manifest His love to that heart.

But at the same time, He does favor some of His servants who live near to Him, and who are called by Him to special service, with very remarkable manifestations of His light and glory.

These revelations are not incessant. I suppose that no man is always alike. John was in Patmos I know not how long, but he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's-day" on one occasion, and he specially notes it. I do not suppose that Daniel or Ezekiel saw visions every night, or beheld the glories of God every day.

Humanity is scarcely capable of the incessant strain of a perpetual manifestation of God. These things are, as we shall see, "like angels' visits, few and far between." There is a fellowship that can always be kept up, but the flood tide of manifestation—a noonday revelation—will not last on continually.

Ezekiel enjoyed a special manifestation, and he tells us when it was, for men do not see God's face without recollecting it. He knew the date and recorded it. "In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten." Days of heavenly fellowship are red letter days to be remembered so long as memory holds her seat.

Yes, and it is noteworthy that *the occasion of these manifestations was one of great distress.* Five-and-twenty years of captivity must have been enough to wear down the spirits of God's servants. Hence, He whose feet are as fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, comes and manifests Himself to His people, burning like brass in a furnace, giving them their times of comfort after twenty-five years of captivity.

He says, too, that it was fourteen years after the city had been smitten, after it had been laid as a ruinous heap. Then God appeared. Oh, beloved, when you have been long sorrowing, you may expect bright days. The coal-black darkness will brighten after all. Nights do not last forever. Whenever you have much joy, be cautious—there is a sorrow on the road. But when you have much sadness, be hopeful—there is a joy on the way to you—you can be sure of that.

Our blessed Lord reveals Himself to His people more in the valleys, in the shades, in the deeps, than He does anywhere else. He has a way and an art of showing Himself to His children at midnight, making the darkness light by His presence. Saints have seen Jesus more often on the bed of pain than in robust health.

There were more manifestations of Christ in Scotland among the heather and the hills in the days of bloody Claverhouse than there are now. There was more seen of Christ in France, I do believe, in the days of the Huguenots than ever is seen now.

I fear me that our Master has come to be almost a stranger in the land in these days, compared with what He was once, when His people wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented—for then He was meeting them at every turn and corner. Let us hope that, if days are gloomy now, and we ourselves are in trouble, our Beloved will come and manifest Himself to us as He does not to the world.

It appears, in this case, that *the manifestation to Ezekiel was made when he was put into an elevated condition*. He says, “In the vision of God he brought me into the land of Israel, and set me up upon a very high mountain.” God has ways of lifting His people right up, away, away, away from mortal joy or sorrow, care or wish, into the spiritual realm. And then, when the mind has been lifted above its ordinary level, and the faculties are brought up by some divine process into a receptive state, He reveals Himself to us.

These times come not always, but blessed are they to whom they come at all. When on the mount alone with God, their spiritual nature asserts supremacy over the body, till they scarcely know whether they are in the flesh or not—then the Lord reveals Himself to them.

When He had elevated him thus, it appears that *He conducted him to certain places*, for He says, “For to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither.” God’s children are brought in experience to unusual places, on purpose that they may get clearer sights of the love and grace and mercy of God in Christ than they could obtain elsewhere.

I have sometimes been puzzled to know why I underwent certain states of mind. I have found out the reason occasionally—perhaps as often I have not. I remember preaching to you one Sabbath-day from the text, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and if ever a minister preached from that text fearing that it was true of himself I did. I was under an awful darkness all the while, and I could not tell why.

But on the Monday evening there came to me one who, by his very appearance, I could see was not far from madness. His eyes were starting from his head, his face was full of terror—and when he was in the room with me alone, he said, “You have delivered me from self-destruction. I am a man that God has forsaken, and no one has ever spoken to my soul or my experience till last Sunday night.”

By God’s great grace and infinite bounty we were able to pilot that brother into smoother waters, and I hope that he now lives to rejoice in God. I felt thankful to the last degree that I had been dragged through all my depression, because I was able to help him.

Sometimes our experience is for the good of others, and sometimes it is for our own good. You cannot see the beauty of certain gems unless you place them on black velvet. When you have something black behind, then you see their luster.

So there are promises of God in which you never will discover their very brightest meaning except they are set against some dark soul-trouble. Much of faith’s education may be called black-letter learning. Very black the letters are, too, and very ugly looking, but they must be spelt over.

You cannot see the stars in the daytime—you must wait till the sun has gone down. Many promises of God you cannot see till you are in the dark, and when the soul is in gloom it may be that the Lord allows it to get there, that it may gaze upon the starry promises, and value every ray of light that streams from them.

So you see, dear friends, God leads His people from one place to another of Christian experience, along hills and dales, ravines and precipices—all in order that their minds, being elevated, they may be prepared to see bright visions of Himself, and know Him better, love Him better, and serve Him better.

However, it is not outward circumstances that can affect the divine purpose—*there must always be a movement of the divine Spirit*. In the third verse you read, “He brought me there.” When you get home, just look through the chapter, and see how this is repeated. “And he brought me to the inner court, and he brought me to the north gate, and he brought me” to this and to that.

We never learn a truth inwardly until God brings us to it. We may hear a truth, we ought to be careful that we do not hear anything but the truth, but God must bring that truth home. No truth is known well until it is burnt into us as with a hot iron.

Some doctrines we can never doubt. “Oh,” said one to me, failing to convince me of some new theories, “no one could get a new idea into your head except with a surgical operation.” That witness is true if the new idea be contrary to the old-fashioned Gospel. The things I preach are part and parcel of myself. I am sure that they are true.

“Are you infallible?” say you. Yes, when I declare what is in God’s Word. When I declare God’s truth, I claim infallibility—not for myself, but for God’s Word. “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

It will not do to be saying, “These are our views and opinions.” Why, if the doctrines of grace are not true, I am a lost man. If they are not the very truth of God, I have nothing to live for. I have no joy in life, and I have no hope in death. May God bring you, dear friends, into a truth, and I will defy the devil to bring you out of it. If God brings you to it, if He writes it as with His own finger upon your soul, you will know it with solemn certainty.

People may say, “Where is your logic? and how does this consist with the progressive development of human thought?” and all that. I reply, “*You* can go and fiddle to what tune you please. As for me, these things are part and parcel of myself, and I have made them my own.” I have gripped them, and they hold me fast. I have no choice about them. I do not choose to believe in free grace, I believe it because I cannot help it.”

When one was asked whether he held Calvinistic doctrine, he answered, “No.” “Oh,” said the other, “I am glad to hear that.” “Ay,” said he, “but Calvinistic doctrine holds me.” There is a great difference between holding truth and truth holding you. You will not hold truth aright unless you can say of it, with all your heart, “The Lord brought me into it.”

“He brought me towards the south. He brought me into the inner court. He brought me forth into the outer court. He brought me to the temple.” He did it all. “All thy children shall be taught of the LORD,” and there is no teaching like it, for He that is taught of God is taught infallibly.

Thus I have spoken upon the manifestations with which God favors certain of His people.

II. Now, secondly, let us notice THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THESE CHOSEN MEN WHILE THEY ARE THUS FAVORED.

“The man said to me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee.” Did He not mean this—“Use all your senses, all your faculties, all your wits to understand divine truth”? When the Spirit of God favors you with light, mind that thou see, and when there is a sound of grace, mind that you hear. Be not one of those forgetful hearers who behold their likenesses in a glass, and then go their way and forget what manner of men they are.

Oh, how much more we should understand of God’s Word if we gave our mind to it. We tell our children to learn their lessons “by heart.” If we put the full meaning into that expression, that is the way to learn the things of God. Learn them all over—take them into yourself by every faculty you possess. Strive as God shall help you by His Spirit to get at their innermost meaning by every power that is given you.

First, He says, “*See with thine eyes.*” What are the eyes for but to see with? He means this—look, pry, search with your eyes. Do not let the truth flit before you and then say, “Yes, I have seen it.” No. Stop it. Hold it by meditation before the mind’s eye, and see with your eyes. Look, look, look into it. Remember what is said of the angels—“Which things the angels desire to look into”—not “to look *at*,” but “to look *into*.”

Looking *to* Christ will save you, but it is looking *into* Christ that gives joy, peace, holiness, heaven. Look into the Gospel—let thine eyes be intent and steadfastly fixed upon every truth—especially at choice times when God favors you with the noontide light of His face. Then be doubly intent upon His Word.

And then He puts it, “*Hear with thine ears.*” Well, a man cannot use his ears for anything else, can he? Ay, but *hear* with your ears. Listen with all your might. You are to spy out the meaning with the mind’s eye, but besides that, try to catch the very tone in which the promise or precept has been uttered. Treasure up the exact words, for though cavilers call it folly to speak of verbal inspiration, I believe that we must have verbal inspiration or no inspiration.

If any man shall say to you, “The sense of what your Father said is true, never mind His words—you would reply, “Yes, but I would like to know precisely what he said, word for word.” I know that it is so in legal documents. It is not merely the sense that you look to, but every word must be right. God’s

Word, as it came from Him, came in such perfection that, even to the syllables in which the sense was clothed, there was infallibility about it.

When I get God's Word I would desire to hear it with my ears as well as see it with my eyes—to see its sense, and then to love the expressions in which that sense is conveyed to me. He cares little for the sense of the words who is not jealous over the words which convey the sense. Oh, brethren, whenever God does, by His Word, open His heart to you, do not lose anything. Do not lose a sound—a syllable.

The Lord demands something more. "*Set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee.*" Oh, but that is the way to learn from God—by loving all that He says—feeling that, whatever God says, it is the thing you want to know.

It is well when your whole heart comes to know the truth, and when it knows it, encompasses it about with warm affections, so that it may be like a fly in amber, the Word in the midst of your heart, encased there, enshrined there, never to be taken away from you. Set your whole heart on the Word of God.

Some people like to read so many chapters every day. I would not dissuade them from the practice, but I would rather lay my soul asoak in half a dozen verses all day than I would, as it were, rinse my hand in several chapters. Oh, to bathe in a text of Scripture, and to let it be sucked up into your very soul, till it saturates your heart!

The man who has read many books is not always a learned man, but he is a strong man who has read three or four books over and over till he has mastered them. He knows something. He has a grasp of thoughts and expressions, and these will build up his life. Set thine heart upon God's Word! It is the only way to know it thoroughly—let your whole nature be plunged into it as cloth into dye.

The Lord bids us *do this towards all that He shall show us*—"Set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee!" We are to be impartial in our study of the Word, and to be universal in its reception. Brothers and sisters, do you pick over God's Bible? I pray you, give up the habit. I have known professors who would not read certain chapters. Never read another till you have read that passage which now displeases you. Learn to love it, for if there is a quarrel between you and a Scripture, it is you that is wrong, not the Scripture.

And if there is any part of the Word of which you can say, "I differ from *that*," the Word will never alter—the party to alter is yourself. Try to follow the Lord fully, even though it should cause the revision of cherished sentiments, and even the alteration of your denominational connections.

"Are we to be so particular in little things?" says one. Ay, it is in little things that loyalty comes. A loving and obedient child obeys his father without saying, "This is a great thing, and this is a little thing." "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." The habit of trifling with little duties grows very soon into a seared conscience about larger matters.

"Oh, but we need not be so particular," says one. Indeed, we must be. "Why are you so precise?" said one to a Puritan. "Sir," said he, "I serve a very precise God." "The LORD thy God is a jealous God"—mind that—and He would have us to be a jealous people as to all His Word, whether of doctrine, or of precept, or of promise.

Oh, for grace to be willing and ready to see all that He would have us see, and to hear all that He would have us hear, and to receive into our heart all that He would have us receive.

Thus I have spoken upon the manifestations which God gives to some of His servants, and the responsibility under which they are placed by them.

III. But now, thirdly, what is the practical design of all this? WHAT IS GOD'S REASON FOR MANIFESTING HIMSELF TO HIS SERVANTS?

The object is this—"Declare thou all that thou seest to the house of Israel."

First, see it yourself, hear it yourself, give thine heart to it yourself, and then declare it to the house of Israel. I have lately heard of a minister who said in the pulpit, "The doctrine of atonement—I have heard a great deal about it, but I do not understand it." He is going to take a holiday that he may solve

some of his doubts. If he does not solve his doubts soon I should recommend he extend that holiday for the term of his natural life.

He who does not understand the doctrine of the atonement should read “The Shorter Catechism” and pray God to enlighten him. That is a book written for the young and ignorant—and it might be useful to many ministers. God grant us grace that we may know what we do know, and not attempt to declare to others anything but that which we have seen and heard and taken into our own hearts.

But that being done, we are to *tell the truth to others*, especially to those whom it concerns. He had seen the form and vision of a temple and a city—he was to speak of this to the house of Israel. Dear brother, you cannot tell who it may be to whom you are to speak, but this may be your guide—speak about what you have seen and heard *to those whom it concerns*.

Have you been in gloom of mind, and have you been comforted? The first time you meet with a person in that condition, tell out the comfort. Have you felt a great struggle of soul, and have you found rest? Speak of your conflict to a neighbor who is passing through a like struggle. Has God delivered you in the hour of sorrow? Tell that to the next sorrowing person you meet.

There is such a thing as casting pearls before swine—that can easily be done by an imprudent talkativeness—but when you find people who are hungry, give them bread. When you find people that are thirsty, offer them water. When you find that they need a blessing from God, tell them of that which has been precious to your own soul.

Ay, but still this is not all your duty. God has shown us His precious Word that we may tell it to the house of Israel. Now, the house of Israel were a stiff-necked people, and when Ezekiel went to them, they cast him aside—they would not listen. Yet he was to go and teach the Word to them.

We must not say, “I will not speak of Christ to such a one, he would reject it.” Do it as a testimony against him, even if you know he will reject it. Go you, my brother, and sow your seed, and recollect that in the parable the sower did not only cast a handful on that fair spot of ground that was all ready for it, but he sowed among thorns and thistles, and he cast seeds even on the highway, from which the birds of the air soon removed it.

“Give a portion to seven and also to eight.” “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, this or that, or whether it shall be alike good.” Do you go and tell what God tells you. Remember what we read just now. “What I shall show you in secret that reveal ye in the light. What I have spoken to you in closets, that reveal ye upon the housetops.”

“Are we all to be preachers, then?” Yes, all that have been taught of God are to teach. “Are we all to stand up in public?” says one. I did not say that, but somewhere or other—perhaps in the pew where you now sit, or on the steps as you go out, or by the roadside, or in the shop tomorrow morning, you can all put in a word edgeways for Jesus Christ. Drop a sentence or two for the honor of His dear name.

“I do not know what to say,” says some one. Do not say it, then, brother. I would recommend you not say anything if you do not know what to say. But if you have seen with your eyes and heard with your ears, and received into your heart, then you know what to say, and the first thing that comes to hand will be the best thing to say, for God, who knows the condition of people’s minds, knows how to fit you to their condition, and make your experience as a Christian to tally with the experience of the man who wants the aid of your light. Go, and the Lord be with you.

If there are any here who have never seen the Lord, if they have any desire after Him, if they have any sense of sin, if they have any wish for the eternal light, let them remember that gracious word—“Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,” and that precious invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

May the Holy Spirit bring you to trust in Jesus at once, and to the name of the Lord be the praise forever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 10:16-42

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—720, 814, 764

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