

Man's Redemption the Joy of the Angels

By Rev. Alexander Stewart, Cromarty

"Which things the angels desire to look into." -1 Pet. 1:12

TO THE man of the world the salvation of the gospel is one of the most insipid and uninteresting subjects imaginable. His apathy appears in his treatment of the Holy Scriptures, the great record of salvation. The Bible is either read very carelessly, or it is altogether neglected. He sits with listlessness under the preaching of the gospel, indifferent often as to what is said, whether it be true, or whether he understands it or not, and this want of interest, or even a more positive feeling, is but too apparent in the manner in which he makes light of the invitation to the gospel feast, offering the most frivolous excuses for not complying with it. His understanding being "darkened through the ignorance that is in him, and blinded likewise by the god of this world, he is alienated from the life of God." The gospel is hid to him in respect to its glory; he has no apprehension of its transcendent excellence, and no desire to participate in its blessings. Even those of us into whose hearts the light of the glorious gospel has in some measure shined are likewise but too apt to be infected with the same spirit. Surrounded consciously by invisible objects, which are continually soliciting our attention, and yet living among men by whom the great salvation is habitually neglected, we are ever in danger of being overpowered by these unceasing influences, and so of relapsing into a state of spiritual slumber.

There are various ways in which this spirit might be opposed. We might address your fears in the language of the mariners to Jonah: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, and that thou perish not." Or we might exhibit to your hopes the great things which God has promised to those who love Him; and ask you, if a kingdom which cannot be moved, a crown which fadeth not away, be such trifles as not to be worth making some exertion to obtain them? Or the words of God might more be re-echoed in your hearing, and the demand made, whether He has not a right to expect attention from His creatures. These might prove powerful considerations; but the one suggested by the words before us is different, and very peculiar. As Paul

speaks (Romans 11:11) of provoking his brethren, the Jews, to jealousy by the Gentiles, i.e., of exciting by a holy emulation amongst the Jews that earnest attention and interest in the gospel which was felt by the Gentiles, so would we endeavour to provoke you to jealousy by the conduct of angels, beings of a totally different order from us. Learn, then, that the salvation of the gospel, the grace manifested to you, the incarnation of God's eternal Son, the life of holiness and beneficence which He led, the miracles which He performed, the grace and truth which, like the dew from heaven, dropped from His lips, the indignities which were offered Him, the hardships to which He submitted, the complicated and unparalleled sufferings which He endured, the decease which He accomplished at Jerusalem, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, the conversion of sinners, the gospel dispensation, the restoration of the Jews, the calling in and fullness of the Gentiles, the millennial glory, the resurrection of the dead, the consummation of all things at the final judgment-all these, the sufferings of the Messiah, with the glories which were to follow, insipid and uninteresting as they may be to man, for whom the mighty inter-position was made, are, notwithstanding, things which angels desire to look into.

There seems to be an allusion in the words of the text to the situation and position of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies, a species of reference to the typical service of the law which is perpetually occurring in the New Testament (Exodus 25:17-20).

In further illustrating the interesting fact stated in the text, viz., that the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories which resulted from His sufferings, are a subject which strongly engages the attention of angels, it may be proper, in the first place, to advert shortly to some things respecting the nature, character, and employments of these celestial spirits and then in the second place to enquire what in the mysteries of redemption, as a manifestation of divine glory, makes the subject so deeply interesting to angels.

I. Notice briefly some particulars relating to the nature, character, and employments of angels - who and what are those beings of whom the Apostle speaks? This is evidently necessary in order to understand the passage, and properly to feel its force. If those who discover a deep interest in a subject be

adduced as a recommendation of the study of such subject, and an inducement to imitate in this their example, it is obvious that very much indeed depends on the character of these persons. If it is a theme in which persons of exalted genius and of most excellent dispositions find peculiar delight, the inference is that the subject itself must be peculiarly excellent and interesting.

Angels are beings of very high mental and moral endowments. The Scriptures give us sufficient reason to believe that they are an order superior to us. The Psalmist, in the eighth Psalm, although speaking of man as having dominion over this lower world, and crowned with glory and honour, still acknowledges, in the same passage, that he "is lower than the angels." The destruction of Sennacherib's army, the pestilence which wasted Israel, the death of the first-born in Egypt, and other similar events ascribed in Scripture to the ministry of angels, afford an appalling idea of that strength in which the Psalmist tells us in another Psalm they "excel," so that there seems to be more than a mere poetical imagination in the idea of our great poet that they can arm themselves with the very elements by which they are surrounded. Satan, who is described in Scripture as possessed of peculiar subtlety and power, although an instance of a sadly perverted mind, affords a high idea of the intellectual superiority of angels. The Apostle speaks not of fallen angels, but of those who kept their first estate, and who are holy beings, and are expressly called in the Scriptures holy angels.

Such being the high order of intelligence to which angels belong, attend next to the very peculiar means of improvement which they possess. They dwell in heaven, in God's immediate presence, the place of His glory, and the habitation of His throne. The angels see God's face. In this expression there is a reference to the practice of Eastern kings, who admitted none but their chief counsellors and favourites into their presence. This is an honour which is not granted to any sinful mortal man, for God said to Moses, "Thou canst not see my face, for no man can see me and live." But in the conclusion of the Book of Revelation, we are told that God's servants shall in heaven see His face. They shall enjoy a full manifestation of His glory, and be admitted, in a certain degree, into His counsels.

Now, this is a privilege which the angels have always enjoyed. They are represented as the immediate attendants of the King Eternal. When Isaiah saw in vision the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, the seraphims were in

attendance, and worshipping, they cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." "God's chariots," says the Psalmist 68:17 "are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them, as in the holy place." "Take heed," said Christ (Matthew 18:10), "that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." In the Book of Revelation, where we have a glimpse of the heavenly world, we see that the holy angels surround the throne of God, they contemplate His glory, and they "do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word" (Psalms 103:20). They are angels of light, and they dwell in the world of light. No human being was in existence when God created the heavens and the earth; man saw not the wonders of creation. Hence God demands of Job (38:4), "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the cornerstone thereof?" But when God prepared the heavens, and set a compass on the face of the deep, when thick darkness was the swaddling-band of the infant world, and when He commanded light to shine out of darkness, these sons of the morning were present, and sang together, these elder sons of God shouted for joy.

Not only did angels witness the wisdom, power, and goodness manifested in creation, they have likewise witnessed the events which have since that taken place in this world. They saw our first parents happy in Paradise, and afterwards expelled for their transgression. They saw Noah and his family enter the ark, and the avenging waters of the deluge sweep away an ungodly world. They saw Abraham leave his kindred and his father's house, and wander a stranger and a pilgrim in the land of promise. They saw Israel oppressed in Egypt, delivered by a strong hand and an outstretched arm, led through the wilderness, and settled in Canaan. They have seen the rise and fall of empires, and interesting events of which we are in absolute ignorance. And we must take into account the advantage they had in understanding these events as a part of the dispensation of providence to them. This knowledge of the facts must be correct, because they witnessed them, and likewise had access to know their causes. While not pretending to define the extent to which angels are acquainted with the purposes of divine providence, it is unquestionable that they have not only extensive

knowledge of historical matters of fact, but likewise of the connection of such events with the general dispensation of providence as illustrative of the divine character. They are behind the curtain which conceals the invisible world from our view. What we call the light of revelation seems to be but some scanty rays of the noonday splendour in which they dwell penetrating this curtain.

Now, apply these remarks to our present subject. The angels, we have seen, are superior beings of very high powers of mind. They are furnished likewise with most ample means of improvement and of increasing their knowledge. At what time they were created we are not told; but as Adam was tempted by a fallen angel, there can be no doubt they were created before man. For these six thousand years at best, then, with minds which were never darkened by sin, free from all the imbecility of infancy or of age, or the infirmity of mortality, with the wide field of creation, and with a most extensive view of the dispensations of providence before them, God Himself being their instructor, they have been contemplating His character, as illustrated by the wonders which He is continually performing. And what, think you, is the subject which rivets the attention of these exalted spirits? It is the sufferings of Christ, and the glorious consequences. The stable at Bethlehem, and the garden of Gethsemane, and the hill of Calvary, furnish illustrations of the divine character which they find nowhere else. And the angels, the inhabitants of heaven, leave its glories for a season to learn, from what is taking place in the earth, new songs of adoring praise.

Among us, if one discovers a star which no other observed before him, or writes a history of some nation, or accomplishes some literary or scientific achievement, he is straightway applauded as a man of genius and science, and among men he may be entitled to the distinction, nor do we by any means grudge him the honour: but, when like the philosophers of Greece, such an one begins to vaunt himself, and to despise Christ crucified as foolishness, it is high time to remind him that the angels who celebrated the creation of the very star which he has now discovered-the angels, any one of whom knows more of the destiny of the world than all the men on earth together - the angels who lived in heaven thousands of years before he was born - instead of considering the cross of Christ foolishness, turn to it with admiration as an object which eclipses every other manifestation of divine glory! I apprehend their language would be similar to that of Paul, when speaking of the comparative excellence of the Jewish and Christian

dispensations, "Creation is glorious indeed, but it has no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory (of the cross) that excelleth." But philosophers are not the only characters that see no excellence in the cross of Christ. We are surrounded by multitudes who can find in their daily worldly employments and amusements subjects of far keener interest. Oh! is it not wonderful, has it never struck you as surprising, that the angels who never sinned, happy although Christ had never come into the world, should yet feel more interested in the great salvation than the sinners for whom He died?

II. Consider now what, in the mysteries of redemption, makes the subject so deeply interesting to angels, i.e., why do angels desire to look into these things? Here, then –

Negatively, it is not vain or impertinent curiosity. One of the considerations which induced Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit was that the tree was desirable to make one wise; she and her husband expected "to be as gods, knowing good and evil." They were discontented with the amount of information which God had been pleased to vouchsafe to them, and by unlawful means attempted to pry into what was forbidden. The same disposition continues to characterise their posterity; while, on the one hand, we continue in a state of ignorance of those things which are of the highest importance, and which God has been mercifully pleased to reveal to us, we are on the other very prone curiously to search into what is not revealed, into what God purposely conceals from us. We are not diligent and anxious to be wise up to what is written and yet we often attempt to be wise about what is not written. Hence it was that when God descended on Sinai, He gave solemn injunctions to Moses to set a fence around the mount to prevent the people breaking through to gaze.

But such is not the disposition of angels. These exalted and pure spirits have such views of the infinite majesty of God as humble them in the dust. The mystery of redemption is to a certain extent unfolded to them, and so far as God has been pleased to make the revelation, they show their gratitude and admiration by studiously and earnestly contemplating it. But a step farther they presume not to go. Anything like an irreverent familiarity with God, anything like a scrutinising, arraigning spirit, so common, alas! among foolhardy creatures on earth, is utterly unknown among them.

Since, then, to speak more positively, it cannot be from a principle of vain or impertinent curiosity the angels desire to look into the mysteries of redemption, the question recurs - What is it that thus so deeply engages their attention? Were you, my friends, to see the ark of the testimony, and the cherubim intently looking upon the mercy-seat, and were you at the same time made aware of the spiritual import of these emblems, might not the wish very naturally arise in your breasts - "Would that the cherubim spake, that we might know the subject of their thoughts, and the cause of their admiration, as they stand gazing on the wondrous mercy-seat!" Well, on one occasion they actually did speak. They did break silence - not the golden figures, but the angels themselves, which these cherabims represented. One night (Luke 2:8-15), as certain shepherds were watching their flocks on the plains of Bethlehem, "the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said to them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest" - in the highest heavens, among the highest order of intelligences, who are the inhabitants of the high and holy place- "on earth peace, goodwill toward men," i.e., salvation to men! Such was the song of angels when they announced the incarnation of Him whom the mercy-seat typified; such, as we learn from their own lips are the sentiments which fill their hearts and minds as they steadily contemplate the humiliation of Messiah, and the consequences of His sufferings.

As holy creatures, they derive their chief happiness from beholding the glory of God. In the history of redemption, the divine glory is manifested in a manner so singular, so remarkable, as to attract the notice and admiration of angels, and to afford them a delight so great that with incessant and unwearied earnestness they look into it. This indeed is one great end which was to be accomplished by the redemption of man. The Apostle informs us that the unsearchable riches of Christ and the manifestation of Him who was the brightness of the divine glory- the great mystery of godliness God manifested in the flesh- that this mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God was so revealed- that

Christ was now seen of angels-for this among other reasons that unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:9,10). And, further, the angels' song discovers to us likewise that they not only desire to look into the singular manifestation of the divine glory, but also that, as beings of the highest and most disinterested benevolence, they delight in contemplating the blessed consequences of the Redeemer's sufferings in the salvation of myriads of the human race. "Peace on earth," they say, "and goodwill to men." Thus, are we furnished with a two-fold reply to the question, "Why do angels desire so earnestly to look into the sufferings and glory of Messiah?" They do so, first, because in these things they behold a peculiar manifestation of the divine glory; and, secondly, because, as benevolent beings they rejoice in the salvation of sinners.

Let us inquire, then, how the scheme of redemption affords a manifestation of the divine glory even to angels.

Here we must bear in mind the character and attainments of these exalted spirits. There are many things which to children are matters of the utmost astonishment which excite no such surprise in persons of maturer years. Men, even prophets and apostles are but children in comparison with these sons of the morning creation. They are children in capacity compared with the elder sons of God. Were a person born and brought up in the retirement of the country to be introduced at court, made acquainted with the policy of the Empire and the affairs of the State, and were he shown the wonderful works of art with which the metropolis of a mighty empire abounds, he might very probably be overwhelmed with wonder, whilst persons born and bred in the metropolis would view them with comparative indifference. Now, the holy angels are the inhabitants of the metropolis of the universe, the city of the great King. They live and have always been in the court of the King of kings. If, then, the cross of Christ be an object which angels stoop from heaven to contemplate, if it be such as to rivet the attention even of these natives of heaven, who have for ages been favoured with various manifestations of the divine character, it can be no ordinary object. It must, if only in common with the other works of God, be glorious; but it must in some important respects excel in glory. What we have to inquire into, then, is the pre-eminence, the excellency, of the glory of redemption.

The mystery of redemption excels in glory because in it each particular attribute is more illustriously manifested than in any of the works of God. There are two circumstances which prevent us from experiencing the overwhelming astonishment on this subject which otherwise we certainly should. The one is the blindness of our minds, and our ignorance of the exceedingly rigid principles of the divine government. We are, as the Psalmist says, apt to think "God such an one as ourselves." The other is, that we are taught from our very infancy that God's own Son became man to save sinners; hence this great truth is to us very much deprived of its novelty, and also of its moral grandeur. But this is not the case with angels. They lived before a Saviour was known or needed, and while they experienced the riches of the divine goodness, a mysterious dispensation had deeply imprinted on their minds a most awful sense of the divine justice and the purity of God. They had seen their own companions, once holy and happy as they were, presuming to sin against their Maker. The punishment of the crime seems to have instantaneously followed the commission of it. The rebels were expelled from heaven, and cast into outer darkness. They had seen the earth when she opened her mouth and swallowed up Korah and his company, and had heard their cry as they descended alive into the pit. Had you seen the fiery destruction which overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, had you seen the avenging waters of the deluge sweep away into perdition the myriads of an ungodly world, you might then have some faint conception of the feelings of awe and fear which filled the minds of the holy angels when they saw hell- that terrible and then unknown place -first open her jaws to receive the apostate spirits. Such a dispensation must have impressed their minds with a sense of divine purity, justice, and majesty, which nothing short of annihilation could erase. Conceive, then, if you can, with what sentiments of astonishment these celestial spirits must have witnessed this great and dreadful God, this consuming fire, assuming the character and the office of the Saviour of sinners. The Creator a creature! The Eternal an infant of days! The Omnipotent a man compassed with infirmities! The Supreme Law-giver made of a woman, made "under the curse" of a violated law! The Majesty of heaven and earth an object of insult and derision to those very devils whom so lately His own right hand had hurled into hell! He who is emphatically the living One, the Author and the Prince of Life, stretched cold and lifeless in the tomb! And what I cannot but feel to be the greatest wonder at all, the Holy One - He whose absolute holiness angels adore with veiled face -

submitting to have sin imputed to Him, to have sin brought into immediate contact with Him, to be charged with guilt-remaining speechless as if guilty, standing like a condemned criminal at the judgment-seat of God and man, to be numbered with transgressors, and suffering the vilest, the most ignominious of deaths, as if He were the very "chief of sinners"!

Every part of the work of creation displays skill and contrivance which manifest the Creator as the only wise God. But in the cross of Christ there is a hidden and mysterious wisdom which excelleth all. There are two ways in which a law can be honoured- one by rewarding the obedient, the other by punishing the disobedient. But through the sufferings of Christ the law of God is not only upheld simply in honour, it is actually more glorified by the salvation of the transgressor, who believes in Jesus, than it could possibly be by his condemnation (Rom. iii. 25). Sin is the greatest of all evils, the cause of all the suffering in the universe; but such is the wisdom of the cross that sin, the very essence of evil, is made the occasion of the greatest good. The Apostle says the foolishness of God is wiser, that is greater, than the wisdom of man. Through the cross it turns even the deepest laid devices of Satan into folly. How did the seed of the woman bruise the serpent's head? By power? No! but by weakness! By the aid of His friends? No! but by the machinations of enemies! He let them have their will. He permitted them to seize, crucify, kill, bury Him; and it was in being thus defeated that He conquered. The ignominy of the accursed tree was His honour; His death was His victory. It was upon the very cross to which His enemies nailed Him in malicious triumph that He triumphed over principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly. "In the day ye eat of the tree," said Satan to Eve, "ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," meaning, in his heart, that they should be such gods as he and his associates were, knowing good lost by the bitter experience of evil. But such is the wisdom of the cross, that the very lies of Satan are converted into truth, to his utter confusion. Holy angels know good only. Satan knows evil, and good only by its loss. But redeemed sinners knew, as their deceiver meant, good lost by the experience of evil but now, through the bitterness of evil and the sweetness of good, they are made like the Son of God. Oh! how truly incomprehensible is that wisdom which devised a scheme by which seeming impossibilities are performed, and things seemingly incompatible are reconciled! A holy God reconciled with sinful man; the law more honoured in the salvation of

sinners than it is either in the happiness of angels or the misery of devils; the greatest good extracted from the very essence of evil; Satan's schemes frustrated by their very success; the cross of Christ the instrument of his triumph; and the world, where God had been most dishonoured, made such a theatre of His glory as attracts the very inhabitants of heaven! Well might the Apostle exclaim, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

How astonishing is the power of that simple word which created the heavens and the earth out of absolutely nothing! But how more wondrous far is the greatness of that strength in which the Redeemer travelled when He made bare His arm and came "mighty to save." "Who knoweth the power of thine anger!" said the Psalmist. Consider the manifestations of divine power which took place at the deluge, when the windows of heaven were opened and the fountains of the abyss were broken up, and the earth reeled and staggered like a drunken man. Contemplate the still more awful display of divine anger which shall take place on that day when the wrath of God shall be revealed from heaven, the elements melting with fervent heat, the heavens passing away like a scroll, the world in flames. Yet these are but the preludes of wrath. The flames of a burning world are but the glittering of the sword of divine justice when it is unsheathed. The devils are angels, and mighty angels, who excel in strength; but even they cannot endure the power of God's anger; it would annihilate them. They must endure it by degrees, and compensate by length of duration for an intensity of suffering which no created being could support. But the Man Christ Jesus endured the wrath of God alone, and to the uttermost. Oh, what tremendous manifestation of power was there! The Prince of Life, sinking to the dust of death beneath His Almighty Father's wrath! In other cases, we contemplate God creating out of nothing, or doing His will with mere creatures which are supported by His hand. But here, we almost tremble as we speak it, we see a divine person inflicting a degree of suffering which nothing but the omnipotence of another divine person could support. Well might angels contemplate with wonder the sufferings of Him who is "the power of God." What an awful display of divine justice, of divine purity, and of divine hatred of sin was there! High in rank as angels are, they are still but creatures. Here, however, the Lord of angels suffers. In their case it was the personally guilty who suffered. In Christ's, the personally innocent. He suffered for others, not for Himself. One might have imagined that His motive in

suffering would disarm the hand of justice, that justice could not strike excellence so unparalleled. But such is the absolute inflexibility of this divine attribute, that when the Son of God Himself stood in the room of the guilty, He was not spared.

Once more, how infinitely does the cross of Christ transcend every manifestation of the divine love. What are the riches of the universe, of heaven itself in all its glory, in comparison with the Creator Himself-the unspeakable gift? They are but as the very dust of the balance-as dross, as nothing. "Herein is love" to make angels wonder. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The love of Christ in its length, and breadth, and depth, and height, is beyond the mighty grasp even of angels' comprehension.

Thus, does redemption excel in glory, inasmuch as there is a wisdom in its contrivance, a power in its execution, a goodness in the deliverance wrought by it, and an infinite rectitude in the means by which the deliverance is accomplished, which immeasurably surpass all other manifestations of the divine perfections. The pre-eminent glory of redemption appears further, in that excellencies which elsewhere are manifested separately are here combined. The works of creation afford abundant illustration of the wisdom and power of God; but the traces of His moral attributes are by no means so apparent therein. In heaven all exult in the goodness of God; but there is no practical display of His justice, and of the severer attributes of His nature. In hell God's justice and purity are awfully manifested. He appears as an offended King and Judge; but there is little evidence of His kindness as a Father who hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Nor is there in this, you will observe, any discernible inconsistency. The miseries of a place of punishment may not directly illustrate the goodness of God, but they are not inconsistent with His goodness. The joys of heaven may not display God's anger, but neither are they inconsistent with His being angry. It is not an inconsistency, but rather a speciality in the occasion (as being a limited one from the very nature of things), in consequence of which there is but a partial illustration of the divine character. Now, the peculiar excellence in redemption to which we at present call your attention, is that it is entirely free from any such imperfection; that it illustrates the divine attributes, not separately, but in combination, not partially, but fully. It not only exceeds each, but it combines all. On the Cross of Christ not only is divine justice more awfully illustrated than in

hell itself, goodness more gloriously than in heaven, power and wisdom more illustriously than in the works of creation; but the Cross contains in itself all that is to be known of God in heaven, in earth, and in hell together. All the lovely tints of the rainbow that surrounds the throne blend here in purest, intensest light. In the Cross of Christ, the glory of God is manifested in all the colourless purity of meridian splendour.

The pre-eminence of redemption appears in its possessing a glory peculiar to itself a glory found nowhere else. For anything we can learn from the Bible, an angel might traverse the vast extent of creation; he might, with the eyes of heaven, look into the depths of hell, and yet never discover that God was merciful, gracious, and long-suffering; that He both would and could pass over transgression and sin. Mercy seems to partake so much of human weakness that it might be deemed almost incompatible with the unsullied purity and unbending rectitude of the divine nature. But the Cross of Christ demonstrates that God is merciful; that though He be infinitely holy, even a consuming fire, He can, nevertheless, without tarnishing His purity in the slightest degree, endure with longsuffering the provocation of sinners; that although He be just and right, and without iniquity, He can, nevertheless, without deviating from the strictest rectitude, justify the ungodly. Nay, so far in this case is mercy from encroaching on purity, truth, justice, or any of those perfections towards which it seems most unfriendly, that these attributes are actually more glorified, more conspicuously illustrated than if mercy never existed. Never did judgment appear more awfully sacred and glorious than at the very time that "mercy rejoiced over it." But let us consider how such a manifestation could affect angels. For although they be sinless creatures, and therefore in no personal need of mercy, yet the fact that God is merciful is a discovery of very high interest and importance to them as well as to us. We cannot say that angels in a state of innocence feel pain; yet when they considered the fate of their companions, and their own situation, they must at times have been filled with care approaching at least to painful apprehensions. They must have felt as if standing on the brink of a precipice - their footing so secure, so firm, but a slight error might precipitate them irrecoverably - might infinitely remove them beyond the very possibility of restoration. God must have appeared to them utterly without mercy, incapable of anything like forbearance towards creatures - creatures certainly by no means incapable either of sinning or

suffering-and this arising directly from the absolute perfection of His nature, as the polish and lustre of a diamond are due to its extreme hardness. In private life you may perhaps have met with a man of very high sense of honour - a man whom you would pronounce incapable of a mean or dishonourable action, but who, if you had inadvertently given him any cause of offence, would prove inexorable and unforgiving. In your intercourse with him, although his politeness and attention might be very agreeable while they lasted, you would yet be pursued by a disagreeable fear that they might be suddenly arrested. Something you may have thoughtlessly said has most unintentionally but too certainly given him great offence. The breach of friendship is irreparable, for he has no toleration for a failure of which he is himself incapable. Some such feelings as this- a feeling of the brittleness of the tenure by which they held their place, might sometimes have occurred to angels, an apprehension which the fate of their companions was by no means calculated to diminish. Now, the glory of redemption is that it removes all such painful apprehensions, so far as the character of the infinitely holy God is concerned. The Cross demonstrates the blessed truth that God is not only a Sovereign of infinite majesty, and a Judge of inexorable righteousness, but that the great God has the heart of a Father; that He punishes, not because He has no feeling for the suffering of His sinful creatures, for "His Name is love," "He delighteth in mercy," "He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner," "and judgment is His strange work," but because the sovereign demands of righteousness in the all-supreme Governor require, when the occasion arises, that the irrevocable doom shall be pronounced.

Mercy, however, is His delight; what He does from choice-what it gives Him pleasure to do. Oh! with what sacred, what intense interest must angels have pondered testimonies to the divine character in terms like these - "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth" (Ezekial 33:11). "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Psalms 103:13) absolutely, unchangeably. Perfect as He is, He yet "knoweth and considereth the frame" of His creatures. "Can a mother forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15). "I could wish myself accursed for my brethren," said Paul, but God first took upon Himself the nature of man, and then actually made Himself accursed for His brethren. When Christ came near and

saw the city of Jerusalem, He wept over it. Angels might indeed adore with profoundest awe the Eternal Majesty seated upon a throne, of which it is said that Justice and Judgment are its habitation. They might thank Him with all their heart for His innumerable favours. But the Almighty in human nature, weeping over sinners-God in tears-is a sight which must have for ever enshrined Him in their hearts! This is the all-surpassing glory of redemption, a circumstance in which it indeed excels in glory.

God created the worlds by Jesus Christ; and Christ by His Spirit made the heavens (Psalms 33:6). But from the work of creation itself we could never have learnt the distinction of persons in the ever- blessed Trinity. By the work of redemption, however, the glorious distinction is made apparent. We are thereby admitted into a view of the divine nature which we could never have imagined nor comprehended otherwise. Not only God glorified generally, but each of the divine Persons manifesting forth His own peculiar glory.

Finally, the Cross excels in glory, because it illustrates, sheds a lustre on, everything else. The prophet says: "God created the earth not in vain, but he formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18) - which evidently intimates that, were the earth not inhabited it would in a certain sense be a world in vain. What would the world and all its contents be were it not for man, were it not that it ministers to the support and education of spirits who shall live for ever? Many objects derive an interest and importance from circumstances to which nothing in themselves gives them any title. The admirers of ancient history know well the enthusiasm which classic names and classic objects inspire; and it were easy to make mention of places and objects in our own country in themselves very insignificant, such as no traveller would think of observing, but they are hallowed in our remembrance- the spots where patriots have fought or martyrs have fallen - or where our ancestors, driven by persecution from their homes, have met together to worship the God of their fathers. And that man is not to be envied who could walk unmoved throughout the highly favoured land where patriarchs wandered as strangers and pilgrims, where prophets delivered their predictions, where apostles first proclaimed the Gospel, where angels conversed with men, and where the Prince of Prophets and Apostles and Angels lived and died.

What Judah is to us, the earth is to the angels. Insignificant the world may be in itself, poor and worthless we its sinful inhabitants may be - but this is our glory, that the Creator Himself tabernacled for a time amongst us: that the earth we tread was trodden by Him; that the air we breathe was breathed by Him. Once it was man's highest glory that he was beautified with the image of God; but his glory now is that God Himself has become man.

The salvation of the Cross sheds a lustre on the dispensations of providence. What are those mighty empires which in our youthful days we were taught to admire? In Scripture they are denoted by the emblem of "beasts of prey." The page of history is filled with pictures of human ambition, tinselled by what is only the semblance of virtue. To our apprehension, on a review of those dim ages past, their intrinsic insignificance and vanity are perceived. But this speedily disappears when we recognise the ever-ruling providence of the Eternal Sovereign, who guides all events; however insignificant, in preparation for that kingdom which cannot be moved. The Cross makes heaven itself more glorious. It is the place where God confers on His people the rewards of the Redeemer's sufferings; whilst Hell is the place where are confined the enemies of the Redeemer, the place to save men from which the Son of God died.

Angels, as beings of pure and disinterested benevolence, we have said, delight in contemplating the happy consequences of Christ's sufferings in the salvation of myriads of the human race. Amongst us superior privileges invariably excite envy. Joseph was greatly beloved and favoured by his father Jacob, and this exposed him to the envy and hatred of his brethren. Were angels in the least disposed to envy, they could find far greater reason for it than they. That a race of beings inferior to themselves should be so peculiarly honoured as that God Himself should take their nature into union with His own, would have been astonishing enough. But that this condescension should be exhibited towards sinful rebellious creatures, and that they should be exalted to an equality of rank and privileges with them, beings undoubtedly of higher order, would be peculiarly surprising, and that which, in fallen human nature, would have inevitably awakened feelings of jealousy and hatred. But angels have no pride of rank or of birth, for they greatly rejoice in the salvation of men and sinners. They rejoice in the addition of a new order of creatures to the heavenly society. They might have rejoiced at the

prospect of this indeed at the creation of man; but the parables of the fifteenth of Luke inform us that the recovery of man, dead and lost, is, emphatically, their joy.

The general principles upon which a sinner of the human race is saved are precisely the same in respect to each individual. There is one common Saviour, one atonement, one faith, one hope; all are in this respect saved in the same way. But while there is thus but one Spirit, there is a great diversity of operation, according to the peculiar circumstances and dispositions of individuals. This must have occurred to everyone who has read with interest the lives of Abraham, David, or any pious person, either recorded in Scripture or not. You cannot say, after concluding the life of any distinguished saint, that you have found one who is saved in a manner different from other sinners; nevertheless, there is a peculiarity always in each case which gives us new and interesting views of the manifold grace of God.

Such is a specimen of the society of heaven. Are we fit for that society? Are we preparing for it? Or are we still under the influence of the malignant fallen angel? And are we content to be his wretched companions and captives for ever? What a reproof to the apathy of man is the deep interest which angels discover in the gospel! For us was the Saviour given-for us He suffered and died. To us has the word of salvation been sent and preached, yet what listless indifference do we manifest! What frivolous excuses do we make for that indifference! "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "Kiss ye the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way!"