

LIFE GIVEN FOR A PREY

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“And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not, for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest”- [Jer 45:5](#)

THESE words were spoken by Jeremiah the prophet to Baruch the son of Neriah; and they were addressed to him under particular circumstances. It was at the time when the Lord was accomplishing His purpose of carrying His people Judah into captivity; when, according to His righteous judgments, the Levitical sacrifices were for a time to cease, the temple to be destroyed, and the people to be uprooted from their own city and country, and taken into the land of Babylon. These were times, doubtless, of great temporal affliction. The presence of the invading army must have carried with it all those desolations which that terrible scourge of God invariably brings; and the righteous as well as the wicked must have alike suffered in this general calamity. Sword, pestilence, and famine came alike upon all, upon him that swore, as upon him that feared an oath. [Ec 9:2](#)

But in the case of “the remnant according to the election of grace,” there were superadded to the weight of their temporal calamities the heavy burdens of spiritual affliction. The severe judgments of God upon the land were so many visible testimonies of His displeasure. And it seems as if the experience of God's people in that day was of a character similar to the general gloom. The dark lowering cloud that hung over Jerusalem cast its shadow over the souls of the living family.

We thus see a connection between Jeremiah's experience in the Lamentations and the temporal afflictions of Judah; and the same cause may account for the lamentation that Baruch poured out in the words preceding the text, and of which the Lord takes this special notice: “Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch: Thou didst say, Woe is me now, for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.”

“Grief added to sorrow”-spiritual trials added to temporal trials, soul affliction following upon natural affliction, wave calling to wave, and burden heaped upon burden; and both together so depressing his spirits, so weighing him down, that he “fainted in his sighing, and could find no rest.”

The Lord doubtless saw in Baruch's heart that which Baruch did not see himself; he saw lurking there a secret craving after things which God has

never promised to bestow upon His people. He discerned through the thick veil spread over his heart that there were immoderate desires working in his bosom, and that he was aiming at things quite inconsistent with the purposes of God, the character of the times, and what was really profitable for his own soul. Viewing, then, with His heart-searching eye what was thus secretly going on in “the chambers of imagery,” the Lord addressed Himself to the very circumstances of the case: “Seekest thou **great things** for thyself? seek them not; for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.”

There seems to have been in Baruch’s mind a secret hope that the Lord would not bring down upon Judah the judgments denounced; at any rate, he appears to have cherished a lurking expectation that he himself would not be involved in them. Amidst all his grief and sorrow, his fainting and sighing, **ambition**, was not dead within; and there was a restless aiming at things inconsistent with the afflictions to fall upon his country, and with his own character as a prophet of the Lord. Now who of us can plead, “Not guilty!” to a similar charge?

In considering, then, these words, I shall take them, as applicable to a child of God, and as describing some of the inward workings of his heart; and I shall endeavour at the same time, with God’s blessing, to trace out the Lord’s method of dealing with His family as intimated in the text.

I. The evil, then, that lurked in Baruch’s carnal mind lurks in ours. His heart resembled yours and mine, as being made from the same material, and derived from the same corrupt source.

1. Thus, led aside by the powerful workings of this corrupt nature, we are often seeking great things **temporally**. Riches, worldly comforts, respectability, to be honoured, admired, and esteemed by men, are the objects most passionately sought after by the world; and so far as the children of God are under the influence of a worldly principle, do they secretly desire similar things.

Nor does this ambition depend upon station in life. All are more or less deeply infected with it, till delivered by the grace of God. The poorest man in these towns has a secret desire in his soul after “great things,” and a secret plotting in his mind how he may obtain them. But the Lord is determined that His people shall not have great things. He has purposed to pour contempt upon all the pride of man. He therefore nips all their hopes in the bud, crushes their flattering prospects, and makes them, for the most part, even in this world, poor, needy, and despised.

It may seem strange, but I know from experience it is true, that even those who profess truth, and are fully aware that such a profession draws down upon them hatred and contempt, yet feel at times the workings of a secret ambition to be esteemed even by those whom in their right mind, they know to be enemies of God and truth. But the Lord will never let His dear people be esteemed and admired by a world dead in sin, or dead in profession. “Ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake.” And however consistently and uprightly he may act, however he may be enabled in all things to walk agreeably to the precepts of the gospel, yet everyone that contends for the power of vital godliness, and manifests that he has the mind of Christ, will find himself hated, despised, and slandered, not only by the ungodly world, but by those who stand high in a profession of religion, while they inwardly deny the power thereof.

The express testimony of God Himself is that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” [2Ti 3:12](#) From persecution, therefore, none of Christ’s true followers can be exempt. And even with respect to what are termed “prospects in life,” in the case of God’s children they are almost invariably broken to pieces. Whatever schemes or projects the Lord’s people may devise that they may prosper and get on in the world, He rarely suffers their plans to thrive. He knows well to what consequences it would lead—that this ivy creeping round the stem would, as it were, suffocate and strangle the tree. The more that worldly goods increase the more the heart is fixed upon them, and the more the affections are set upon idols, the more is the heart drawn away from the Lord. He will not suffer His people to have their portion here below. He has in store for them a better city, that is a heavenly, and therefore will not suffer them to build and plant below the skies. I have often said that the same axe which laid the first blow to me spiritually, cut up all my earthly prospects naturally; and though the Lord has beyond my expectation taken care of me in providence, yet it has been in a way quite contrary to my former prospects and natural expectations.

2. But again: there is a seeking after great things **in religion** as well as in providence; and God’s people, especially in early days, are often led astray by seeking great things religiously. I use the expression **religiously** in opposition to **spiritually**; for there is a great deal of religion current in which there is no spirituality. There are, for instance, **gifts**, which by no means prove the existence of grace in their

possessor; and as these gifts often draw forth admiration, they are very pleasing to the carnal mind.

Many of God's people are seeking great things for themselves in this way, and are mortified and disappointed when they are withheld. Thus some private Christians are very anxious for a gift in prayer, others for a good memory, others for a talent in conversation or writing. They are galled and mortified because in these things others outshine them. So ministers are often desirous of a greater gift in preaching, a readier utterance, a more abundant variety, a more striking delivery than they possess. And this, be it remarked, both in minister and people, not for the glory of God, but for the glory of the creature; not that praise may be given to the Author and Finisher of faith, but that pride, cursed pride, may be gratified; that they may be admired of men.

These gifts being for the edification of the Church, they are granted, comparatively speaking, to but few; and when God imparts them to His children, He usually takes good care that they shall not glory in them. If a minister has a gift for preaching, God sometimes so stops his mouth, so shuts him up in barrenness and darkness, brings such a veil over his eyes, and so hides the power and savour of truth from his soul, that he is obliged feelingly to confess that "he gropes for the wall like the blind, and gropes as if he had no eyes" [Isa 59:10](#)

If he is a private Christian, and has a gift in prayer, and is elated by it, the Lord will sometimes so shut him up before the people, and put such a temporary extinguisher upon his gift as shall abundantly convince him that even if he has a gift, the exercise of it is not at his own command, and that thoughts, feelings, and words must be communicated to him from time to time by the Father of lights. Or if the Lord does not often thus shut his mouth, yet he shall have such powerful temptations, such desponding feelings, shall be so assailed with the fiery darts of Satan, and sink so low in doubts and fears, shall find so little access to the Lord in private, and enjoy so little secret communion with Him, that his very gift shall be one of his greatest trials, and he shall perhaps often view himself as a wretched hypocrite, who will be one day be manifested as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. If he be a minister, he will have to bury his head in the pulpit cushion, after he has finished his sermon, with shame and confusion of face, as I have often done, and beg pardon of the Lord for the base hypocrisy and presumption, that in spite of himself have so awfully mingled themselves with all that he has uttered in God's name.

3. Others again of God's people are desirous of a great **knowledge** of gospel mysteries; and the seeking after great things in this way is, perhaps, a temptation most powerfully felt in our early days. We are often then aspiring after a great knowledge of truth in the letter, instead of thirsting after the savour, power, and unction of truth in the soul. And thus by reading many books, hearing various ministers, and going into the company of the children of God, we often heap up imaginary riches, not knowing that the wind of the Lord is coming to blow upon them, and to make these fancied treasures like "the chaff of the summer threshing floors."

4. Others of God's ambitious ones are seeking to stand always in an **unwavering assurance of faith**. They read in the Scriptures of "rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and full of glory;" they see it written, that "the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, and peace," and they hear the apostolic precept, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice." But not having been humbled, nor brought low, not having been taught the depths of their fallen nature, and the fountains of the great deep not having been spiritually broken up in their heart, they receive these passages into their judgment without the unctuous experience of them, or their being divinely applied to their soul. The sons of Kohath might bear the ark; [Nu 3:31](#) but that was no reason why Uzzah should touch it. What was faith in them was presumption in him. Thus many touch with the hand of presumption what they see in the Scriptures, as Uzzah saw and touched the ark, without a divine warrant, and because joy and peace are spoken of in the Word of God, they lay claim to them without their being shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, as heavenly cordials for a fainting spirit.

5. Others again of God's people, without contending for unceasing joy, consider that it is a believer's privilege to **walk always in the liberty of the gospel**. The liberty of the gospel is a most blessed thing, but like all other spiritual blessings it must be first brought into the conscience, and then maintained there, by the power of God the Holy Ghost. All other liberty is licentiousness. The liberty of the gospel is often prated about by those who never knew the bondage of the law; and were they asked whence they derived their liberty, all they could do would be to point out some text of scripture, such as, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" [Ga 5:1](#) And what seems more surprising still, I believe there are among God's

quicken family those who, with little else but bondage in their own soul, are contending **doctrinally** for the liberty of the gospel, and would be very angry if they were told they were not in the enjoyment of it. Such are some of the great things, **religiously**, that pride and ambition often lead the people of God to seek. Baruch, perhaps, was fired with ambition to possess Jeremiah's gifts, though, perhaps little reckoning to have with them Jeremiah's trials. The Lord then speaks to him, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not;" as if He had said to him, "Baruch, these things which thou callest great are not worth thy seeking; I see the deceitfulness of thy heart, and the ambition of thy carnal mind; thou art seeking great things; seek them not!" This was the counsel that God gave to Baruch; and this is the counsel that He now gives to His living family: "Seek ye great things? seek them not."

But some may say, "If we are not to seek great things, what are we to seek? Are we not commanded to 'covet earnestly the best gifts?'" The great things that Baruch was seeking were little things in the sight of God; as those things which are great in the eyes of God are little in the eyes of professors. God and man have very different ideas on this subject, for "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways."

Does the Lord say, "Seek not **great** things?" What then? "Seek **real** things." Mark the difference. **Great** things may suit the carnal mind, but **real** things will alone suit the spiritual mind. "O that Thou wouldst bless me **indeed!**" cried one whose inmost soul was panting for realities; and with his prayer do I, in my right mind, join heart and soul. Realities are what my soul, when the Lord is pleased to bedew me with His Spirit, is breathing after; not **great** things, but **real** things. By **real** things I mean those spiritual blessings that are dropped into the soul by the mouth of God-the solemn verities of the kingdom of God made known by the Holy Ghost-such as the smiles of God's countenance, the testimonies of His mercy, atoning blood sprinkled upon the conscience, Christ's righteousness imputed and revealed to the soul, visits from Jesus, soft whispers of His love, blessed intimations of His favour, communion with Him, a broken heart, a tender conscience, a contrite spirit, godly fear in exercise.

Now these are **real** things. They are not what dead professors desire. Such never want power, unction, savour, dew, to be felt in their souls. There is in them no sighing after the smiles of God's countenance, or

the manifestations of His covenant love. The great bulk of what is called “the religious world” despise these things; they are not in their book, their Sunday school does not teach them; the gown and bands of their pulpits does not preach them. They would rather hunt after that will-o’-the-wisp called “decided piety,” or self-righteousness new christened “holiness,” or missionary zeal, or tract dispersing.

Having no faith to realize unseen things, they want something visible to sense, something intelligible to reason, something tangible, something within the grasp of the natural mind. But to be poor and needy, tempted and tried, with no hope but that which God gives, no faith but that which God communicates, no love but that which God sheds abroad, no peace but what He speaks, no religion but what He breathes into the soul, is as much beyond their understanding as their desire. Nor until a man has come to the end of all the religion of the creature, and been divinely initiated into the spiritual knowledge of the only true God, has he any understanding of, or appetite for, those real things in which the very sum and substance of vital godliness, the very marrow and essence of true religion consists.

There is a desire in many to be religious, but they utterly mistake what true religion is. To live a good life, to abstain from sin, “to cultivate,” as it is called, grace, to be holy, to do good to their fellow-creatures, to exert themselves for the conversion of others-in these and similar things do most consider religion to consist. But a man may do, and be all this in the flesh, “which profiteth nothing” [Joh 6:63](#) and thus come short of eternal life.

I solemnly assure you that these things will never speak peace to your souls-I mean “the peace of God which passeth all understanding”-in a dying hour. These things have been possessed by hundreds who have perished in their sins. They were, perhaps, highly esteemed professors in their day; were pointed out as examples to others, died in a false peace, and in funeral sermons were sent triumphantly to heaven; when, could their souls’ miserable flight have been followed, they would have been seen to sink into the lowest hell. These things, if God has touched your conscience with His finger, you know from experience are delusive and vain; and, therefore, what your soul is panting after in those secret moments when God’s eye is looking into your heart, is to feel the savour, the power, the unction of heavenly things, and to have the blessed visitations of God’s love, and the manifestations of His grace and mercy.

II. But the Lord graciously condescends to give Baruch a reason why he was not to seek great things. “For behold,” He says, “I will bring evil upon all flesh; but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.”

1. The “evil” which God threatens in the text, “to bring upon all flesh,” is not **moral** evil. Some ungodly men have preached the awful doctrine that “God is the author of sin.” Far from my soul be that horrid blasphemy! God is not the author of sin; that holy, pure, and spotless Being could not, cannot, create that which is evil. Far, far from my soul be such a horrid thought!

There is, indeed, a passage in Scripture in which God is said to “**create evil**” [Isa 45:7](#) and another, in which we read, “Shall there be **evil** in a city, and **the Lord hath not done it?**” [Am 3:6](#) But in neither of these passages is **moral evil**, that is, sin, intended, but “calamity, trouble,” as the context shows, and as the word in the original sometimes signifies, as, [Ge 19:19](#) “Lest some evil”-that is, calamity-“take me, and I die.” “I make **peace**, and create **evil**.” The one is the opposite of the other; but **moral evil** is not the opposite to “**peace**.” “Trouble, distress, war,” are the opposites of “peace;” but “moral evil” is the opposite of “**good**.” So “the evil in a city, which the Lord doeth” [Am 3:6](#) is not sin; but God asks a question, whether such **calamities** as war, pestilence, or famine can take place without His bringing them upon it.

The evil spoken of in the text is of the same kind, and means trouble, distress, calamity. This evil the Lord brought literally upon all flesh, when He brought the armies of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem, when He gave up the holy city into the hands of the Chaldees, suffered the temple to be destroyed by profane hands, and the people to be carried into captivity. This “bringing of evil upon all flesh” (**that is, in this restricted sense, “upon all the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem”**) was indeed battering down all Baruch’s carnal ambition. Seventy years captivity and desolation would effectually mar all his fond hopes of worldly advancement.

But viewing Baruch as a spiritual man, we may extend the meaning of the words, and take them in a spiritual acceptance as referring to God’s work upon a man’s heart. In this sense the Lord may be said to bring evil upon all flesh, as far as His saints are concerned; not, however, by introducing sin into their mind, or by infusing moral evil into their heart, but by bringing those troubles upon them which to the

eye of the flesh appear evils, and yet often are productive of the greatest good.

For instance, a child of God may be secretly aiming at great things—such as respectability, bettering his condition in life, rising step by step in the scale of society. But the Lord will usually disappoint these plans, defeat these projects, wither these gourds, and blight these prospects. But in doing this, He brings no moral evil upon His afflicted child. He may reduce him to poverty, as He did Job; smite him with sickness, as He did Lazarus and Hezekiah; take away wife and children, as in the case of Ezekiel and Jacob; or He may bring trouble and distress into his mind by shooting an arrow out of His unerring bow into the conscience.

He has a certain purpose to effect by bringing this trouble, and that is to pull him down from “seeking great things.” For what is the secret root of this ambition? Is it not the pride of the heart? When the Lord, then, would lay this ambition low, He makes a blow at the root. If great things **naturally** have been sought after, the blow falls **there**; if great things **religiously**, the blow is usually made in **that** direction. Thus when the Lord brings cutting convictions into the conscience; when He strips away fancied hopes, and breaks down rotten props, the great things (**so through ignorance esteemed**) in religion, sought for previously, and perhaps obtained, fall to pieces in this day of visitation.

Some here perhaps, myself among the number, may have fallen into the snare of which Hart speaks when he says, “he hasted to make himself a Christian by mere doctrine;” and in the day of visitation, when the Lord searched Jerusalem with candles, found how wretchedly we were deceived by seeking **great** things instead of **real**—aiming at gifts more than grace, and the glittering and the showy, rather than the solid and the substantial.

The Lord may be said spiritually to “bring evil upon all flesh,” when He lays trouble and calamity upon the flesh, and upon all that the flesh loves. The blow falls upon the fruits of the flesh, when it cuts down fleshly religion, and roots up false hopes, vain confidence, and self-dependence. The effect of these strokes is to lay the soul poor and needy at the footstool of mercy; and as the Holy Ghost enlightens the eyes to see, quickens the soul to feel, and raises up power to ask, there is now a seeking after real things—substance as opposed to shadows. Thus pardon, mercy, the testimony of God in the soul, the lifting up of

the light of His countenance, the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus upon the conscience, with all the other spiritual blessings revealed in the gospel, are sought after, valued, and prized.

It is not enough now that they are heard from a minister, assented to in the judgment, or received on the testimony of others. They are only now so far enjoyed as they are tasted, felt, and handled in the depths of the heart. I believe I can say for myself, until evil came upon me in this way, chiefly through a long illness (**though if I have life now, I had it before that visitation**), yet until trouble came, and I was brought low in body and soul, I was never seeking as I have done since, the visitations and manifestations of the Lord's favour. Deceived by Satan and my own heart, I was seeking rather to make myself wise in the letter, than to feel the power of vital godliness in my soul.

But ever since then, amidst many discouragements, and with many alterations and changes, I have felt led, as I never knew before, or at least not from the same pressing sense of need, to seek after the visitations and manifestations of the Lord's favour—the dew of His Spirit, the application of His atoning blood, and the inward testimonies of His love and grace. Nor can I rest for salvation upon anything else. I am not, therefore, speaking at a peradventure. I know the ground, for I have travelled it; I have lined it with laborious footsteps; and therefore having tracked it out, I speak, in my measure, that which I know, and testify that which I feel.

When the Lord, then, thus brings evil upon our flesh, it is not to sweep away any **real** religion that we may possess. It is to sweep away our **false** religion. This winnowing fan is to fan away the chaff, and leave the pure grain. This keen knife of the heavenly Anatomist is only to cut away the diseased excrescences, and unhealthy tumours, and leave the sound parts uninjured. When the Lord brings distress into the soul, it is not to destroy any one grace that has been communicated by the blessed Spirit, but to fulfil that word, “Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.” He puts “His vessels of gold and silver” [2Ti 2:20](#) into the furnace to take away their dross, that they may be “sanctified, and meet for the Master's use.” For He has chosen His Zion in the furnace of affliction; and “He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, that He may purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” [Mal 3:3](#)

2. But we pass on to consider the promise of special preservation which the Lord gave Baruch in the midst of this calamity. “But thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.” In its **literal** sense, it gave Baruch a promise of temporal preservation. In the midst of all the calamities that should befall Jerusalem, his life should be untouched.

But I believe the words contain a deeper sense, and admit of a **spiritual** and **experimental** interpretation.

There is a life given to the elect when the blessed Spirit quickens their souls—a life eternal, communicated to them out of the fulness of the Son of God. This life is a personal, individual life; and thus there seems to be a sweetness contained in the expression, “**thy** life.” “**Thy** life will I give unto thee for a prey.” This life which is treasured up in the fulness of Christ is breathed into the soul in the appointed time by the Holy Ghost, is kept alive there by His Almighty power, and will burn brighter and brighter in the realms of endless day.

This life was **given** unto Baruch; and it is the sovereign gift of God to all His elect. It is not earned by free will, nor merited by creature righteousness; it is not nature transmuted into grace, nor youthful piety which by due and diligent cultivation, through some gradual and imperceptible process, has grown up into spirit. This divine and supernatural life cannot be infused into the blood from religious parents, cannot be obtained from the Sunday school, nor taught by tutors and governesses. The happy partakers of this divine life are not so “born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,” but directly and immediately “of God” [Joh 1:13](#) And that because they were chosen in Christ before the world began, and are personally interested in His blood and righteousness.

3. But we may observe, from the expression made use of in the text, that this life which is given to the child of God, is given to him in a peculiar way. “Thy life will I give unto thee **for a prey.**” Are you not, my friends, continually finding that this life is given in God’s own channel of communication? If your experience resembles mine, you sit sometimes by your fireside, or you take your walk in the fields, sighing and panting after the manifestations of God’s loving-kindness and tender mercy. But I want it to come in my way, not God’s way. I want to have it poured, as it were, into my soul out of Christ’s fulness, without its passing through the channel of griefs, trials, sorrows and difficulties. But God does not give His favours in this way. He says,

“Thy life will I give”-a free, irreversible gift, but to come in a certain way (**I was going to say on a certain condition, but I hate the word “condition”**)-“for a prey.”

Let us see if we can penetrate into the spiritual meaning of these words. The word “prey” points out that this life is an object of attack. We hear of “beasts of prey,” and of “birds of prey,” and the expression implies a carnivorous animal. Thus the words, “Thy life will I give unto thee **for a prey,**” imply that there are ravenous beasts that are continually seeking to devour this life-voracious enemies upon the watch, who are eager to prey upon this life which God the Holy Spirit has kindled in the soul. How accurately and how experimentally do these words describe the inward kingdom of God! Eternal life is given by God, and kept by Him when given; preserved by His power from being ever extinguished. And yet preserved by a perpetual miracle, like a burning lamp set afloat upon the waves of the sea; or, to use a figure that I have somewhere seen, like a lighted taper carried over a heath in the midst of a gale of wind.

But the figure employed in the text points to ravenous beasts that are continually seeking to prey upon that hidden life, which is the gift of God. I do not mean to say that they have any appetite for it, but it is the object of their attack. For instance, there is **unbelief**, that yawning monster, ever opening his jaws to devour, if it were possible, all living faith in the soul. Do you not often find this “beast of the field” [Isa 56:9](#) coming forth out of his den to prey upon the faith of God in your heart?

And at other times, his fellow-ravener, **infidelity**, that other monster from the deep, that other voracious beast from the bottomless pit, will be spreading forth his talons to grasp, in our feelings, all that testifies to the Being, character, and presence of God in the conscience. Some here, perhaps, may never have been so tempted, may never have had these awful suggestions presented to their minds. But if not in this manner, you may have been assaulted with **blasphemous** and **rebellious** thoughts against God.

Or if these beasts of prey have not thus violently roared upon you, the more subtle and insidious inmates of the forest may have sought to make you their prey. **Worldliness, pride,** and **covetousness** may have made much havoc with your religion unseen. The base lusts and filthy appetites of our fallen nature may have desolated your soul, and left sad marks of their talons in your conscience. Or if spared the attacks of

these grosser beasts of prey, **presumption** may have seized you in his grasp; or you may have fallen out of his clutches, as is commonly the case, almost into the jaws of **despair**, and may just have escaped, “as the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear” [Am 3:12](#)

We read, too, of Satan “as a roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour.” Thus, what with the lion without, and the ravenous beasts within, wherever we go, we are beset with ferocious animals that are seeking to prey upon our souls.

Thus, “our life is given us for a prey;” and the power, faithfulness, and wisdom of God are manifested in keeping this life unhurt amidst all its enemies. As Daniel was preserved in the den of lions, and as the three men were preserved in the burning fiery furnace, so the life of God is preserved in the soul, in the midst of lions, as David says, “my soul is among lions” [Ps 57:4](#) and amidst the fires, “Glorify ye the Lord in the fires” [Isa 24:15](#) So that the life of the child of God is one continual conflict between faith and unbelief, between enmity and love, between the grace of God and the rebellion of the carnal mind, between the sinkings of the drooping spirit and the liftings up of the light of God’s countenance.

4. “In all places whither thou goest.” This was true of Baruch literally. Whether he remained with the remnant who were left in the land, under Gedaliah, [2Ki 25:22](#) or was carried captive to Babylon, or was taken down into Egypt, as proved to be the case with him and his brother Jeremiah, [Jer 43:6-7](#) his life was to be secure; but in such a manner as to seem to be in constant jeopardy. His life was given him, freely given, but not for him to play with. His life was secured him by the terms of the promise, as was more clearly expressed in nearly similar words to Ebed-melech, “I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee” [Jer 39:18](#) but so given as to “stand in jeopardy every hour” [1Co 15:30](#) and to be “in deaths oft.” Change of place and scene mattered not. These procured him neither release nor respite. Canaan, Babylon, Egypt, might present different enemies, but enemies were everywhere to be found.

So spiritually, in all places whither the living soul may come, in whatever state or stage of experience it may be, life is given unto it for a prey. Is the child of God sinking in doubts and fears, and well-nigh overwhelmed with despondency, fearing lest “of faith he make

shipwreck,” and go down into the billows of endless woe? His life is given him for a prey. **Despair** is now seeking to prey upon it; but “it shall not be given as a prey to its teeth” [Ps 124:6](#)

Or has the Lord lifted up upon him the light of his countenance? Even then his life is still given him for a prey. **Presumption** may attack the soul that has been thus favoured, or **pride** make its insidious assault; thus, in either state, an enemy is at hand. If in doubt and fear, despair may open its mouth; if blessed with confidence, presumption or pride may “war against his soul.” Thus, in whatever state or stage a spiritual man may be, whether a new-born babe, a child, a youth, a man in Christ, or a father or mother in Israel, his life is still given him for a prey; and, in every stage, he has just so much grace given as is needful for him, and only just so much.

Thus, the deeper a man’s religion is, the more powerful are the enemies that attack him. The babe has little grace and few enemies; the man in Christ and strong in the Lord has enemies proportionate to his strength; the greater the grace, the more the trials; the stronger the faith, the heavier the burdens; therefore, be his state or stage what it may, “**in all places** whither he shall come,” be it the barren sand or the green pastures, the land of great drought, or fountains of living waters—moments of sweet communion, or of guilt and self-condemnation—sorrow after an absent Lord, or enjoyment of a present Jesus; in whatever state or stage of Christian experience he may be, it is still true, “life is given him for a prey.”

This then, my friends, is a short epitome of vital godliness. In my right mind, in standing up in this pulpit, or in any other where the Lord’s providence may call me, I have but one object; not to make proselytes to my creed—not to draw together a congregation—not to work upon your natural feelings; but to contend for the power of vital godliness, so far as I am acquainted with it. So far as I am under divine teaching, my desire and aim is not to deceive souls by flattery—not to please any party—not to minister to any man’s pride or any man’s presumption; but simply and sincerely, with an eye to God’s glory, with His fear working in my heart, to speak to the edification of His people, to do the work of an evangelist, and “to commend myself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” And depend upon it, that a minister who stands up with any other motives, and aiming at any other ends than the glory of God and the edification of His people,

bears no scriptural marks that he has been sent into the vineyard by God Himself; nor will the Lord own his labours, or bless his testimony.

So far, then, as I have been taught the mysteries of vital godliness, this is the truth that I believe and preach-that spiritual life is the sovereign and free gift of God to His elect, a covenant blessing, given freely in the appointed season; and that this life is maintained by the invincible energy of God the Holy Ghost, as an irrevocable gift, and to shine throughout an endless day. And yet though so freely, so irrevocably given, and so inviolably preserved, yet “given for a prey”-with difficulty preserved, so to speak, in the midst of enemies. It thus agrees with those words, “If the righteous **scarcely** be saved,” not “scarcely” as implying any deficiency in the power of God to save, nor any risk of fatal or final miscarriage; but “**scarcely**” on account of the temptations, snares, hindrances, and obstacles with which he is beset.

If the Lord, then, has been our teacher, He has taught us something of these lessons; we have learned the **sovereignty** of the gift by seeing so many passed by, and us, the most undeserving, visited therewith; its **freeness**, by knowing our thorough ruin and helplessness; its **preservation**, by its being kept alive unto this day; and **the manner of its preservation**, by feeling the fangs of so many cruel enemies, and, though cast down, not destroyed. And thus we may set to our seal, that though a rough and rugged, a strange and mysterious way, that yet it is a right way, and one that leads to “the city which hath foundations,” where there are “pleasures at God’s right hand for evermore.”