

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

AND

SERMONS,

OF SOME OF THE

FIRST MINISTERS OF THE ASSOCIATE CHURCH IN AMERICA.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION,

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE ASSOCIATE CHURCH FOR THE FIRST HALF CENTURY OF HER EXISTENCE IN THIS COUNTRY.

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ALBANY:

PRINTED BY HOFFMAN & WHITE.

MDCCCXXXIX.

SERMON,

BY THE REV. DAVID GOODWILLIE.

“Let Israel now say that his mercy endureth for ever.” (Psalm cxviii. 2.)

MAN was made to praise his Maker. This was his delightful employment while he remained in the primitive state of innocence and integrity, in which he was created. But by the fall, he became entirely unfit for such a holy and happy exercise. By sin, he became wholly averse to sing the high praises of his almighty Maker and bountiful and constant Preserver. But when man is renewed by the grace of God, he enjoys a holy pleasure in the blessed employment of praising the God of his salvation. A proper view of man's fallen state of sin and misery affords the most dismal prospect: a knowledge and conviction of the nature and demerit of sin, presents us with condemnation and wrath. Judgment without mercy, is the just but righteous reward of iniquity. Instead of the saints' joyful song of praise, there awaits the sinner “weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth” forever; thence the wretched sinner is led to conclude, that “God's mercy is clean gone forever” and that “he will be favorable no more.” In these dismal circumstances, to hear of divine mercy, the plentitude and perpetuity of that mercy in behalf of the miserable, and the certainty and happiness of its enjoyment to the praise of divine grace, must be most truly wonderful and highly comfortable. But such is the happy prospect presented in our text.

It is probable that David wrote this psalm after the conquest of his enemies was completed, when he was firmly established in the kingdom of all Israel, and had brought up the ark of God to Jerusalem, his royal city. But it is evident that it respects the Messiah, of whom the royal psalmist was an eminent type. Our Lord interprets the 22d verse, and ap-

plies it to himself as the Head-stone of the corner, which was rejected by the Jewish builders, (Matt. xxi. 42.) The apostle Peter makes the same application, (Acts iv. 11.) And the Jews themselves applied the 26th verse to Christ, when they sang joyfully at his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, as the condescending King of Zion, "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." (Matt. xxi. 9.) The psalmist earnestly calls upon the friends of God and religion, to join him not only in a hearty acknowledgment of God's goodness, and a cheerful confidence in his mercy in future; but in a believing expectation of the "sure mercies of David"—The mercy promised to our fathers.

In prosecuting this interesting subject through divine assistance, we shall consider—

I. The declaration of the perpetuity of divine mercy.

II. The call or injunction to celebrate the perpetuity of divine mercy. "Let Israel now say," &c.

1. We are to consider the declaration here made, "His mercy endureth forever."

The term *mercy* is used in various senses in scripture. Human mercy is that kind disposition of mind and tenderness of heart, that compassionates the misery of others, and disposes to contribute to the relief of the distressed. Thus the good Samaritan had mercy or compassion, upon the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and left him half dead.

But mercy is not in God as it is in men, a mere passion or affection, for this would be incompatible with the purity, perfection, independence and immutability of the Godhead. When mercy is attributed to God, it denotes his infinite benignity and goodness, and in the strictest sense it denotes his free good-will and eternal purpose of making some of the fallen race of man both holy and happy, delivering them from the guilt, defilement and dominion of sin, and communicating himself to them in such a manner as is consistent with his own inviolable holiness, justice and truth. Mercy always supposes misery as its object. The mercy of God is his goodness to the miserable. This mercy of God is two-fold. 1. A general mercy or common goodness, which he manifests to all both good and bad. "He maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. v. 45.) "He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil." (Luke vi. 35.) 2. His special saving

grace, love and favor, which he manifests only to his elect. This special saving grace, and everlasting love and favor, is bestowed only on "the vessels of mercy which he hath afore prepared unto glory." And this special mercy is displayed in a special manner by God, as the God of all grace only in Christ. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." This special mercy is used in scripture to comprehend all the blessings of grace in time, and all the blessings of glory in eternity. Common mercies enjoyed by all mankind, both good and bad, are no evidences of God's saving grace and everlasting glory. They deserve our gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise, but still they will perish and decay, and leave those who receive and enjoy them, miserable at last. But special and saving mercies are everlasting in their duration, and will make those who possess and enjoy them, most happy forever. "Let Israel now say that his mercy endureth forever."

This declaration implies

1. That the *sin-pardoning mercy of God* endures forever. "Thou pardonest their iniquity because thou delightest in mercy." (Micah vii. 18.) The sin-pardoning mercy of God flows to the sinner through the shed blood of Christ, in whom God is always well pleased. The merit of Christ's sacrifice for sin is infinite in value, and everlasting in its effects. Hence we conclude that God's rich mercy in pardoning sin, through the infinite value and everlasting virtue of Christ's blood, will endure forever. The sentence of justification can never be revoked. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Christ Jesus our Lord."

2. *Sanctifying mercy.* This gracious mercy is effectually bestowed by the eternal Spirit, the everlasting fountain of divine and saving influences. He commences the gracious and holy change in the washing of regeneration. By his constant influence, conformity to the image of God is gradually increased, until sanctity is consummated at death. "According to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." (Tit. iii. 5, 6.) The happy effect of sanctifying mercy will be felt and enjoyed by the saints of God to all eternity. They will have eternal cause to magnify the sanctifying mercy of God, having been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.

3. *Saving and delivering mercy.* This, the whole church as well as individual believers, have had ample cause to celebrate in all ages of the world. When they have been brought low by their own sin and by the oppression of their enemies, he stretches out his strong hand and holy arm, and grants them a merciful deliverance. Their provocations are many and great, and continual backsliding prevents for a time the deliverance, but sovereign mercy always prevails. God in his great mercy delivered his people from Egyptian bondage, from Babylonish captivity, and from Persian and Grecian oppression. And under the present dispensation he has cast out the great dragon, and in a great measure broken the power of the antichristian beast. And he will at last accomplish a complete and eternal deliverance for his church and people, from all their enemies and troubles, from the power of the second death, and the wrath to come; and make them everlasting monuments of his redeeming mercy. "O give thanks unto the Lord, who remembered us in our low estate; for his mercy endureth forever; and hath redeemed us from our enemies; for his mercy endureth forever." (Psalm cxxxvi. 23, 24.) "He that is mighty hath done great things, and holy is his name, and his mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation." (Luke i. 49.)

4. *Quickening and reviving mercy.* This the church and people of God often need, as they are often sunk into a lukewarm and lifeless condition. Hence David prays, "Quicken me, O Lord, according to thy word. Quicken me according to thy loving kindness." And also the church prays, "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years,—in wrath remember mercy." "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation." "Quicken us and we will call upon thy name." And in answer to these prayers, God, in the multitude of his tender mercies sends out his word and spirit, and grants them "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." Then his people sing with life and vigor, "that his mercy endureth forever."

5. *Strengthening mercy.* When the Lord's people see that their strength is gone, and no help left, then they are to place their hope in God, "the glory of their help." A due sense of their weakness leads them to the mercy of God, in whom is everlasting strength, and righteousness. And when they cry unto him for help, he answers, "My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength is made perfect in weakness." "I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and

down in my name." Then they go from strength to strength praising the perpetuity of God's mercy.

6. *Comforting mercy.* Divine mercy is a sovereign remedy for man's misery. It is a cheering cordial to a distressed soul. A gracious experience of the strong and everlasting consolation of which the apostle speaks, outweighs all the troubles of this life, and enables the saint to "glory in his tribulations." In the midst of his troubles, he can sing with the psalmist, "I will be glad in thy mercy." The God of all comfort says to his distressed church, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

7. *Directing mercy.* This keeps them in a way of duty, and in the path of life and salvation. Moses celebrates this mercy in his triumphant song, occasioned by their deliverance out of Egypt, "Thou in thy mercy leddest forth the people whom thou hast redeemed." God promises to every true believer, "I will guide thee with mine eye." So that the saint may say, with confidence, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

8. *Establishing and preserving mercy.* This David celebrates in thanksgiving before the Lord, when he proposed to build him a temple. "Thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee forever." "This great goodness hast thou promised." And when God acquaints him with the stability of his throne, he says to him, "My mercy will I not take from him." Hence the Psalmist prays, "Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord, let thy loving kindness and thy truth preserve me continually." "He shall abide before God forever: O prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him." And hence the apostle prays that the God of peace would preserve blameless the whole spirit, soul and body of the saints, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Surely nothing but the ever-enduring mercy of God could preserve them from all evil, unto eternal life in heaven.

In a word, this gracious declaration includes *all new covenant mercies*. The covenant itself is "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." Its Head was set up forever, and his righteousness is everlasting; and all the mercies of the covenant are most sure and firm forever.

God is eternally and immutably good and merciful in

himself. He is an everlasting fountain of mercy, from which flows a never-failing stream into "the vessels of mercy," chosen from all eternity to be the everlasting monuments of divine grace. We are to bless God, both because he is good and doeth good. We must praise the Lord, because he is essentially good and merciful, and because his mercy towards his church and people endures forever. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him." (Ps. ciii. 17.) It is *from* "everlasting" in the eternal councils of peace, in their election to eternal life, before the foundation of the world; and it is *to* "everlasting" in its endless consequences, in their eternal glorification, when the world shall be no more. They must run up the never-failing stream of mercy to its never-failing fountain in the eternal God; and they must praise God, not only for the mercy which they experience on earth, but for that which they hope to enjoy in the felicity and glory of heaven forever.

In Psalm cxxxvi, the perpetuity of divine mercy is peculiarly celebrated and repeatedly declared; twenty-six times in that Psalm it is said, "His mercy endureth forever." The repetition of this weighty sentence intimates, that God's mercies are repeated, perpetuated and multiplied, from first to last, with an endless progress and advancement. It implies, that in every particular blessing, we ought to take notice of the mercy of God, and observe that it endures still the same now that it always has been, and ever will be. It also implies, that the everlasting continuance of God's mercy is highly honorable to him, and it is that in which he glories: and also that its perpetuity is most comfortable to the saints, and that it is their duty, and a precious and pleasant privilege, to rejoice and glory in it. Their hearts should be so enraptured with God's everlasting mercy, that the frequent mention of its praise should not cloy on their tongues, but raise them to a higher note in singing their chorus of the spiritual song of the redeemed, in which they will ever be praising God for the plentitude and perpetuity of his mercy. This most excellent sentence God has magnified above all other truths revealed concerning himself—not only by the frequent repetition of it in his word, but by the signal tokens of his acceptance, when it was sung to his honor and praise. At the dedication of the temple which Solomon built, they sang praise unto the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his mercy endureth forever:" then "the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud," in token of his presence and acceptance. (Chron. ii. 5-13.) And in Jehoshaphat's time, when they began to sing

and "praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever." God granted Israel victory over their enemies. Let these things encourage us to sing—"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he his good; for his mercy endureth forever."

II. The call or injunction to celebrate the perpetuity of God's mercy: "Let Israel now say," &c.

The royal Psalmist, who was an eminent type of the Lord Jesus Christ, calls upon "Israel," the ancient people of God by external federal relation, to praise God's eternal mercy. This duty is still binding upon the church of God. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy; and upon the Israel of God." (Gal. vi. 16.)

This call or injunction implies,

1. *A natural aversion and incapacity* to celebrate the everlasting mercy of God. "The dead can not praise him," and such is our natural condition. We are devoid of spiritual life, hope and desire. In order to stir us up to this blessed exercise, there is need of divine power to accompany the divine call, to quicken and incline us to make the declaration. The inward and effectual call of grace and Spirit of God, must attend the outward call and command of his word, to enable and dispose us to sing and say, that "his mercy endureth forever."

2. *A divine warrant* to praise the eternal mercy of God. Had not God of his infinite love provided a way for the free vent of his rich mercy, and proclaimed it to mankind, they would have been forever silent in his praise, nay, so far would they have been from presuming to praise him, that they never would have thought of it. Our warrant to celebrate his infinite mercy is not founded on any natural claim, but on his supreme authority requiring it in his word, which contains both the reason and rule of our duty.

3. *Sufficient grounds* for celebrating God's everlasting mercy. Although the will of God revealed in his word, without any other reason perceptible by us, is a sufficient warrant to perform any duty: yet, in divine revelation, there are many grounds set before us, as so many motives and inducements to praise the perpetual mercy of God: Such as the eternal love of God, the fountain head of mercy—the glorious undertaking of Christ, through whom alone the mercy is displayed to mankind sinners:—his incarnation—finished work—triumphant resurrection—and prevailing intercession forever:—the propagation of the gospel among the Gentiles—security for its success till all the elect vessels of mercy are filled with the glory of God:—and finally, the continual love

and care he has manifested towards his church and people, both in the ordinances of his grace and the dispensations of his Providence. "Through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us."

4. *Peculiar obligation* to praise God for his mercy. Israel, the professed people of God, standing in covenant relation to him, and the special object of his choice, love and care, are here called on to celebrate divine mercy. As the ancient Israel were under peculiar obligations to praise God's mercy, which was displayed in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage—preservation and support in the wilderness, entrance into Canaan, and peaceful possession and enjoyment of the promised land, with all the mercies which attended their lot, more particularly enumerated in Psalm cxxxvi: So the spiritual Israel of God, his peculiar people and treasure, are under special obligations to praise the eternal mercy of God, for this life, with its innumerable mercies and benefits which they possess and enjoy on earth, and for the promise and prospect of the eternal life of glory in heaven.

5. *Eminent seasons* for praising divine mercy. As it is continually exercised towards us, it ought always to be praised. But sometimes it is more evident in its blessed effects—and then we are more loudly called to celebrate it. How loudly did Moses and the children of Israel celebrate the praises of divine mercy at the Red Sea, when God delivered them from Egyptian bondage and the wrath of its cruel kings! The call in the text seems to be given to Israel when they were brought to a happy condition, having obtained many signal victories over their enemies, and had the good prospect of a peaceable and comfortable possession and enjoyment of the promised land. And the New Testament Church has experienced remarkable seasons of grace and mercy, deserving and demanding the liveliest glow of gratitude and praise; such as the extensive spread of the gospel among the Gentile nations, and the renewal of divine truth and godliness at the Reformation—and every true believer has visits of divine grace and mercy at particular times, which will loudly call upon his soul, and all that is within him, to bless the Lord.

6. *Special faith* in God's everlasting mercy. When called to make this declaration, we are called at the same time upon the authority of God, to believe it, with particular application to ourselves. We can not properly comply with this call or injunction, till we can say in faith, "without which it is impossible to please God," "that his mercy endureth forever."

We are therefore, when making this declaration, to look for the blessed experience of divine mercy. In the appropriation and assurance of faith say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and my dwelling place shall be in the house of the Lord forever."

CONCLUSION.

1. Trust and hope in God's mercy which endureth forever. Mercy is the hope and refuge of a miserable sinner. The gospel is revealed for the express purpose that he may cast himself upon God's mercy, and hope in it continually for eternal life and salvation. Christ is the mercy of mercies, and all special saving mercy flows from his merits and mediation to poor perishing sinners. In him we are to "look for the mercy of the Lord unto eternal life." (Jude 21.) Israel and Aaron, and all that fear the Lord, are called upon to trust in the Lord, as their help and their shield. (Ps. cxv. 9—11. Here the very same persons are called upon to confess that the Lord's mercy endureth forever. None can praise God but those who trust and hope in his mercy. The Psalmist says, "I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever." "He that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." "Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption; and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

2. Be glad and rejoice in the plenitude and perpetuity of God's mercy. Why is mercy shewn to the miserable but to make them happy, yea, joyful? Divine grace can gladden the most sorrowful heart, and make it sing "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." In trouble we imagine we get relief by complaining; but we get joy and gladness in praising God's mercy. Let our complaints be turned into praises, and draw all our comfort and consolation from the mercy of God in Christ. We must sing a praising song for God's glory, and a pleasant song for our own solace and delight. To rejoice always in the Lord is the believer's duty, privilege and delight. It may be difficult to reconcile dark and distressing dispensations of God's providence, but we must still believe that his mercy is everlasting, and his truth and faithfulness inviolable. It is matter of joy and praise that he will make all things, although apparently against us, to "work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." If it is a day of darkness and distress, we are to "sing of mercy and judgment." But whatever be our circumstances, we are never so earnestly and frequently called upon in scrip-

ture to believe and repent, as to sing praise and give thanks ; for it is the will of God that we should be most frequently and devoutly engaged in the most pleasant exercises of religion, which will be the eternal employment of the redeemed in heaven. David says, "I will glorify thee, O Lord, my God, with all my heart ; and I will glorify thy name with all my heart ; and I will glorify thy name for evermore." "For great is thy mercy toward me ; and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." "I have trusted in thy mercy ; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord because he hath dealt bountifully with me." "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name—who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

3. Praise God's mercy continually. Through Christ "let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." This was the Psalmist's noble resolution when he said, "I will bless the Lord continually, his praise shall be continually in my mouth." "I will sing of the mercies of the lord forever. For I have said mercy shall be built up forever." We may be ever singing the praises of God's mercy, and yet the subject will never be exhausted. O what a delightful exercise ! What a blessed employment ! The song of the Lamb will never cloy upon the lips of the Redeemed. With unwearied vigor, and with everlasting delight, will they praise the rich mercy of God. This will be the burden of their song, and the sum and substance of their hosanna and hallelujah, "That his mercy endureth forever."

We exhort you, O believer, to get your heart tuned to that song of praise which shall be sung with extatic joy in heaven forever. Neglect not the praise of God's mercy in the dark day of adversity. Be not like the rebellious Israelites, who "remembered not the multitude of his mercies," while they were miraculously preserved by him in the wilderness. Maintain upon your heart a grateful remembrance of the Lord's loving-kindness and tender mercies to you, and the Israel of God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Let not your frailty and afflictions infringe upon your spiritual joy and prosperity. Death itself will be no abridgment of your bliss. Let not your heart be disquieted with your mortality, the shortness of life, and the frailty and troubles that attend it ; for God's mercy to your immortal soul "endureth forever." "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow

to anger and plenteous in mercy.—As a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him : For he knoweth our frame ; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass ; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth ; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more : But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those who remember his commandments to do them." In faith and hope say with the Psalmist, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

O sinner—by faith seek a saving interest in the special mercy of God. Beware of trusting to the common goodness or general mercy of God, which you, like multitudes of others, may experience and yet perish forever. The rich man rioted in the good things of this life, but he died, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in eternal torments. If you have no interest in the special mercy of the Lord, nothing awaits you but weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth forever. Look by faith to God in Christ, who is the glorious channel of God's everlasting mercy to miserable sinners. He is gracious, merciful and propitious to sinners, only in the infinite merits of the sacrifice of his eternal Son. Through his shed blood, grace and mercy flow to us as miserable sinners. Cry mightily to the "Father of mercies," that he would have mercy upon your immortal soul. Pray with the poor penitent publican, "Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner." Look by faith for the mercy of the Lord unto eternal life, through the merits of Christ's righteousness. Wait upon the Lord, who waits to be gracious, and is exalted that he may have mercy upon you. Amen.