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THE GREAT KING.

MALACHI, i. 14. *For I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts.*

THERE are few truths of greater practical importance than the one here announced; and none perhaps which men are more inclined to forget. Of multitudes it may be said, God is not in all their thoughts; and of others, that though they think of him, it is only as their Creator and Benefactor, *not* as their holy and eternal king. They choose to forget him in this relation, that they may avoid the conviction of their own responsibility. But forgetfulness of God, or of the relations he sustains to us, can never annihilate those relations. He is a king upon his throne, swaying a scepter of universal and uncontrolled authority. He is a great king, whose attributes it behoves us to consider, whose will it deeply concerns us to know and obey. This truth the prophet proclaims to the Israelites in the words before us, and proclaims it for the purpose of showing them the guilt of their hypocritical offerings. They had brought the torn, and the lame, and the sick, for a sacrifice, instead of animals "without blemish," as the law required. But what said the answer of God? "Cursed be the man who hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts; and my name is dreadful among the heathen." They had forgotten the majesty of Him with whom they had to do, and treated the great Lord of the universe with a species of disrespect which they would not have dared to offer to an earthly governor—a mere mortal like themselves.

To avoid treading in their guilty steps, let us constantly bear in mind the fact, that God is a great king—a fact immediately and emphatically asserted in the text, by God himself—and claiming on this account our special attention. Our object in the following discourse is twofold:—

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I. To consider in what respects God is a great king; and

II. To apply the subject to some practical uses.

In what respects, then, is God a great king?

1. He is so, first of all, in regard to the greatness of his empire. "Is there any number of his armies, and on whom doth not his light arise?" Cast your eye over the universe; stretch your imagination to the utmost; and can you tell where God's empire begins, or where it ends? You have seen the starry firmament, where unnumbered worlds roll through boundless space; you have felt lost in the immensity of God's works; but how little have you seen! and how little can you see, compared with what exists! It is but the threshold of Jehovah's kingdom that appears to the naked eye. Philosophy with her instruments reveals millions of other suns and other systems which lie far beyond. All that is visible to us bears no greater proportion to the whole of God's dominions, than a single grain of sand to the innumerable multitude which line the ebbing shore. How great a king then must God be, whose empire spreads through the boundless regions of his works—whose government includes in it every moral being in the universe—angels, men, devils, with all the inferior orders of creatures, wonderfully diversified in their natures, and crowding every part of the material world with their existence? Nay, how great a king must He be, whose government extends as well to inanimate as animated nature—who presides over every particle of matter in his vast dominions, and directs and controls its agency in the innumerable changes it is passing, or is destined to pass!

This wide and universal government of God the psalmist celebrates when he calls upon the whole creation, from its highest to its lowest forms, to praise the name of the Lord.—"Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights; praise ye him, all his angels; praise ye him, all his hosts; praise ye him, sun and moon; praise ye him, all ye stars of light; praise ye him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens: Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded, and they were created; he hath also established them forever; he hath made a decree which they shall not pass. Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling his word; mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl; kings and all people, princes and all judges of the earth, both young men and maidens, old men and children; let them praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent, and his glory is above the earth and the heavens."

Every creature in the universe is here summoned to bear a part in God's praise, because a part of his empire and under his control.

2. God is a great king, not only as he possesses a great empire, whose

limits no imagination can conceive, but as he rules it by a power independent and absolutely uncontrolled.

We can easily conceive of a kingdom too unwieldy for its sovereign—embracing a greater variety of interests and agents than he is able to control. Many a king has seen his empire crumble to ruins from its vastness alone: his crown has fallen from his head, because his arm was not strong enough to wield a scepter over his wide dominions. The actors were too numerous for his eye, too powerful for his hand. It is far otherwise with God. He rules the whole with the same ease that he rules a part. For great as his kingdom is, He himself fills it, surrounds it, and pervades every part of it, in the most intimate and perfect manner. He is as intimately present with every atom in the universe, as with the seraph before his throne. Nothing escapes his notice—nothing can resist his hand. All power in his creatures is derived from him, and depends, every moment, upon him, while *His* power is absolute, boundless, and undervived.

Other kings exercise government over an empire formed to their hand; their subjects are not properly their own workmanship; nor are any of the objects to which their power extends. They never gave existence to a drop of water that descended on their fields, nor to a leaf trembling in their forests. But God is literally the author of his own empire; he rules nothing which he did not create, and he created nothing which he does not uphold. Is he not, then, a great king? Who can conceive of his power in calling his kingdom into being? He had only to *speak*, and it was done—to *command*, and it stood fast. Ten thousand times ten thousand worlds, with their myriads of inhabitants, rose into existence at his call; and all these, from age to age, are sustained by his arm. Hence the Scriptures distinctly affirm, not only that all things were *created*, but are *upheld* by the word of God's power, and upheld by the same word which awoke them into being at first.

Consider then this universe—think of the power concerned in creating and sustaining it—and especially in superintending its diversified movements—bounding and directing them all to infinitely wise and glorious results; and can you help exclaiming, “*Surely God is a great God, and a great king, high above all the earth! What power is like unto his power? and who among the sons of the mighty can be compared with him?*”

But though God is independent and without control, he is not therefore *arbitrary*; though he does whatsoever pleaseth him in heaven above, and in earth beneath, it is not simply because he is almighty and irresistible. Which leads me to remark,

3. God is a great king because he is *wise in heart* as well as mighty in strength; he is *just and kind*, as well as powerful. Nothing controls

him but his own perfect will—perfect in *wisdom*, perfect in *equity*, perfect in *goodness*. In the government of his subjects, he enacts such laws and such only, as are adapted to their several capacities, and as invariably tend to promote their individual happiness and the greatest good of his kingdom. In all his measures he sets up his own glory as the highest end, and next to this, and conjoined with it, the happiness of his creatures collectively considered. These ends he steadily pursues, by means worthy of his wisdom, worthy of his goodness, and never derogatory to his holiness, equity or truth.

Such are the principles and such the character of his government;—yet it seems good to him often to take a path which we cannot trace—to pursue designs which lie too deep for the eye of his creatures; still this is his glory, that he is always wise, always just, always beneficent. Is there not then a moral greatness in his administration, which infinitely transcends that of all other kings, and invests him with a dignity and majesty worthy of his eternal throne?

4. Finally, God is a great king in that his kingdom is unchangeable and imperishable.

The greatest earthly potentates are often overthrown; and if not, they die and leave their scepter to other hands. But God is “the king immortal, invisible and eternal.” Ten thousand ages hence his crown will shine with the same transcendent brightness as at this moment; for he himself is the same, yesterday, to-day and forever. No lapse of time can in the least impair his authority—no combination of circumstances or events present the slightest barrier to his will. Who then can conceive his greatness, or glance a thought half way to his throne? Verily, “*He is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, which no man hath seen or can see, to whom be honor and power everlasting.*”

II. Having thus seen how great a king the God is with whom we have to do, let us now briefly apply the subject.

1. If God be such a great king, he may justly require us to worship him. This duty grows out of our relation to him, as his creatures, as dependents on his bounty, and as the subjects of his government. It is right and fit that we should “kneel before the Lord our Maker,” to thank him for our existence, to bless him for all our mercies, to confess our sins to him, and to implore his grace and benediction. It is right that we should daily acknowledge our dependance upon him, commit ourselves to his care, and never fail devoutly to express our sense of his transcendent glory and majesty. All this is due to God as our gracious and eternal king; and all this he must require of us, if he would not give up the order he has established among moral beings, and cease to maintain the rights of his throne. He owes it to himself and to the kingdom which he

governs—nay, he owes it to our own felicity, of which he is the natural guardian, to insist upon this worship—this constant homage of our hearts. If we are believers in revelation, we shall not for a moment question this duty; and even if we are not believers, what objection can we make to it? For if God be a *Father*, where is his honor? and if a *Master*, where is his fear? and if a *King*, a glorious and eternal king, where is his homage? Can you, as a reasonable man, admit these relations, and yet deny or neglect the duties which so obviously correspond to them?

2. But again; if God be indeed this great king, it is a matter of solemn consideration *how* we worship him. He will not be trifled with; he will minutely inspect our offering; and if it be not such as his word requires, such as becomes his glorious majesty and the relations he bears to us, he will assuredly frown upon the offerings we bring. He “is a *Spirit*, and they who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” He is a king, a great king, and they who approach him must do it with the profoundest reverence and humility. It was overlooking these important circumstances—the glorious attributes of Jehovah—his solemn commands, and the relations he sustains to his creatures—which led the house of Israel to bring the torn, and the sick and the lame for a sacrifice. They seemed to have forgotten that God was omniscient, omnipotent, infinitely pure, jealous for his honor, and that the hypocrite could not stand in his sight. Hence they profaned his altars with sacrifices forbidden by the law, and insulted his majesty with gifts which they would have been ashamed to offer to an earthly governor. But are we not chargeable with the very same thing, when we play the hypocrite in our religious services—not rendering to God the unequivocal homage of our hearts? What is it but the torn, the sick and the lame, when we present our bodies before the Lord, and leave our souls behind? when we go into the sanctuary or into our closets, carrying so much of the world with us as to disturb our devotions, and render them a hurried, unfeeling, insipid form, destitute of love and reverence for God, as they are of kindness and benevolence to men? And yet, what can be more unseemly in itself?—what more criminal and offensive in the eye of the great king? We should not dare treat a fellow worm in this manner, who had power to judge of the offence and to punish the insult.

Let us then often inquire as to the character of our devotions;—Are they constant? are they sincere? are they humble and profound? do they glow with disinterested love to men?

3. If God be so great a king, swaying a sceptre of infinite wisdom and almighty power, what reason have we at all times to confide and rejoice in his government?

Dark and distressing scenes may occur, but his hand controls all events: he will surely overrule them to his glory; and no less certainly for the good of all who trust in him. Nothing falls out without his no

rice, or aside from his eternal counsels; good and evil, light and darkness, joy and sorrow, with all their connections are alike in his hands, and are continually under his control. Hence we are assured that "the wrath of man shall praise him, and that the remainder of wrath he will restrain." There may be times when the wheels of his government move high and dreadful—nay, this is what we are to expect, if God be a great king, and the measures which he takes are like himself, above the comprehension of his creatures; but there can be no seasons when we have not abundant cause to rejoice in him, trusting in his unsearchable wisdom and power. With David we may say, in the darkest and most tempestuous season, when afflictions are ready to overwhelm us, "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice—the floods lift up their waves; but the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea than the mighty waves of the sea: the Lord sitteth upon the flood, yea the Lord sitteth king forever."

4. If God be a great king, presiding over all things with boundless wisdom and power, it must be a crime of awful demerit to slight his authority and violate his law. All agree that sin is a transgression of the law, and that its demerit may be estimated in some measure by the dignity and glory of the lawgiver. A sin against a parent is greater than the same sin against an equal, and the more excellent the parent, the more heinous the sin. Were the parent clothed with kingly authority, any disrespect towards him in this relation, any violation of his command would involve deeper guilt, as the obligations contemned are more weighty, and the consequences of transgression more ruinous. What then must be the demerit of sin as committed against God, our holy and everlasting king? Think of the measure of his authority—the perfection of his attributes—the reasonableness and importance of his law—the tremendous consequences of rebellion in his kingdom, which, if not counteracted by his omnipotent hand, might sweep away all the good intended by his infinitely benevolent heart in giving existence to the moral universe.—Seen in this light, can you conceive of any thing more malignant, more base, or more presumptuous than sin? Is it not a contempt of the divine majesty? an invasion of the rights of his throne? What but an attempt to strike the crown from his head, and to wrest the sceptre from his hand? But the attempt is vain, and dangerous as it is vain. For, in the next place;

5. If God be a great king, whose name is dreadful among the nations, it must be a dangerous thing to rise in rebellion against him. For he cannot do otherwise than vindicate his own authority, and tread his incorrigible enemies under his feet.

Is he armed with almighty power? and does the penalty of his law devote the transgressor to eternal death? How then is the rebel to escape?

Without repentance, escape is impossible, unless he could pull down omnipotence, or change the truth of God into a lie. He holds all the transgressors in the universe absolutely in his hands; and can destroy them with infinitely more ease than you can destroy a worm. On every supposition but one, their destruction is unavoidable. If they repent, he will forgive: if they believe in his dear Son, he will restore them to favor; but if they refuse and rebel, they shall die; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Which leads me to remark,

6. Finally; that since God is a great king, they must be *safe*; nay, *honorable* and *happy*, who become obedient subjects of his government, and thus heirs of his everlasting friendship.

They are *safe*; for what can eventually harm them, if under his protection, and sheltered by the wings of his almighty providence?" "The Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and are safe. Beneath them are the everlasting arms. No weapon formed against them can prosper; and every tongue that riseth against them in judgment, God will condemn." "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is the language which he pours into the ear of his saints, so that they may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear." They could not be more safe, did they themselves wield omnipotence.

They are *honorable*; yes, however poor or despised by men. They are sons of God, children of the heavenly king, born from above, and born heirs to an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. They are allied to angels, those exalted spirits who have dwelt in the presence of Jehovah since the morning of creation; and who are quick as winged lightning to do his pleasure. Jesus Christ is their elder brother, and in his exaltation they have a sure pledge of their own. As he has overcome and sat down with his Father in his throne, so they shall overcome and sit down with him in his throne. This is their high and glorious destination, and the period hastens when they will stand forth in the presence of the intelligent universe as persons whom the King of kings delighteth to honor. And are they not then *happy*? Their sins are put away—their sanctification is *begun*, and will be *perfected*. God is their friend and their portion. Soon will they be released from sin and from suffering, and put in possession of joys unutterable and without end.

But who are these persons? and are we of the happy number? Let us decide this point for ourselves, and by an honest and faithful appeal to the word of God. The *righteous*—the *righteous*, they will be happy—the wicked, miserable. Let the impenitent consider this—let them contrast their miserable condition with the safety and felicity of the righteous—and now, while the king of heaven stretches out the scepter of mercy, let them touch and live forever. Amen.