PARABLE OF THE NET (Sermon XX, June 1746)


... and gathered the good into vessels...¹

OBSERVATION VIII.

God will hereafter deal with the righteous, as men are wont to treat that which they prize, as the portion they live upon.

In this parable, Christ alludes to what appertained to the occupation of his disciples. They depended on the fish they caught for a subsistence.

Prop. I. The righteous are God's precious portion.

First. The righteous are precious in God's eyes. This God declares, Is. 43:4, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." [God calls them,] "my jewels," Mal. 3:17.

[He] sets an higher value on the least and meanest {of the righteous}, than on all {wicked men}. He will destroy the wicked when they stand in the way of their welfare. Prov. 21:18, "The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright." He will deliver his saints out of trouble, though in order to it thousands of wicked men be brought into trouble by it. Prov. 11:8, "The righteous shall be delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead."

[God places] higher value on {the least of the righteous}, than on the greatest princes that are natural men; and therefore if any of them stand in the way, {God will not suffer them to touch his saints}. Ps. 105:12, "When they were few in number; yea, very few, and strangers in Canaan."

He that touches God's saint's touches "the apple of his eye," Zech. 2:8. Matt. 18:6, "better were it for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Yea, God will
destroy whole nations. Is. 43:3-4, "For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Sheba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

When the wicked of the old world were ready to swallow up the church; when the army of the five kings [took Lot, Abraham’s son, captive {Gen. 14:12}]; when the Egyptians [threatened the Hebrews at the Red Sea {Ex. 14:26-28}]; when the people of Sihon and Og [opposed the Hebrews {Num. 32:33}]; [when] the inhabitants of Canaan [opposed them]; when the great city Babylon, and the mighty Babylonish empire [captivated them: God destroyed them].

Yea, such is the value God has for his saints, that the whole course of nature {has been overturned on their account}. All things are theirs; all things are ordered for them. II Cor. 4:15, "[All things are] for your sakes."

God’s value for his saints is either,

1. That which consists in his love of benevolence. This is from eternity. From this, God has done infinitely greater things than to rebuke kings, {or to} destroy nations, {or to overturn the} course of nature: [God has] given his own Son {for his saints}. Or,

2. There is that value which God has {for his saints}, consisting in his love of complacence, whereby he delights in the beauty he has put upon them, either by imputation or sanctification.

Second. The saints are God’s portion. This God often declares. Deut. 32:8-9, "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is his people." [God] has as it were left the rest of the world to other god. The great Creator and sovereign Proprietor of all has as it [were] chosen and measured
out a particular part, that he reserves for himself, leaving the rest. Ps. 4:3, "the Lord hath set apart him that is godly."

Of old, God laid claim to a part of the produce of the fields of the children of Israel; and his part was the firstfruits. Jer. 2:3, "holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of all his increase." Jas. 1:18, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits." Rev. 14:4, "The firstfruits unto God and the Lamb."

When it is represented that the saints are God's portion, it is not intended that they are the only part of the lower creation that has a right to, or the possession and disposal of [it]. [They are not] possessors of heaven and earth. He don't relinquish his right to the rest of his creation. [He] don't alienate his sovereign right to, and dominion over, wicked men.

But the following things are implied in the saints being God's peculiar portion:

1. They are his in a peculiar manner, as they are those that God has chosen and called for a special relation and peculiar interest.
   
   [(1)] Relation.
   
   [(2)] Nearness.
   
   [(3)] Interest.

2. They are his in a peculiar manner, as they are chosen and set apart for his special use, in a special manner, for his glory. "I have created him for my glory" [***SS]. [They are set apart] for a more honorable and excellent use. II Tim 2:20, "in a great house there are not only [vessels of gold] and of silver, but also of wood and earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor."

3. As they are that part {of mankind} that God has chosen and set apart for his delight. Ps. 135:4, "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure."

[They are God's] spouse. Is. 62:5, "Rejoice over thee as the bridegroom." Cant. 4:9, "[Thou hast] ravished my heart, [my sister, my spouse]."

[They are God's] orchard of pleasant fruits, Cant. 4:13. "[My beloved . . .] feedeth among the lilies," Cant. 2:16."

He delights in the saints in two respects:

(1) In communicating himself to them. Jer. 32:41, "Rejoice over them to do the good." [The saints are] vessels of mercy. [God] delights in communications of himself, and his own happiness. "Judgment is his strange work" [Is. 28:21].

(2) Delights in beholding the beauty that he has put upon them.

[Prop.] II. As the righteous are God's precious portion, so he will hereafter deal with them as men are wont to deal with that which they prize as the portion they live upon.

For the right understanding of this, I would observe,

First, Negatively. This is not to be understood as though God depends on the saints, or any of his creatures, for any happiness. But,

Second. God, from the great value he sets on the saints, of his sovereign pleasure and free goodness, will hereafter deal {with them} in many respects as {his precious portion}.

Though God is absolutely independent, yet he is pleased to set an high value [upon the saints]. 'Tis otherwise with God than with creatures. The value creatures set on things, is very much from their emptiness and indigence. {But the value} that G. sets {on things, is very much} from his abundance. Such is that value that God, through this overflowing fullness, set {on his saints}, that it is in some respects above all the value that men
set on {on things}. And He will hereafter treat {his saints as his precious portion} in many respects.

[I will] mention two or three instances:

1. He takes thorough and effectual care of them, that none of them be lost. Thus men are wont {to take thorough care of} those things that they highly value, as those things that they place the happiness of their lives on.

2. He will gather them and bring them home to him, to his own house. The husbandman with great care [gathers his harvest to his garner]. The merchant with great diligence and art gathers home treasures from distant parts of the world. So God gathers in his elect, and brings 'em home to him. Matt. 24:31, "And he shall send [his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other]." Eph. 1:10, "that in the dispensation [. . .] he might gather together in one all things." Hence the whole number of the saints are called by the name of the church, the "great congregation" [Ps. 22:25, 35:18, 40:9-10].

There is a twofold gathering in and bringing home of the saints to God: one is by effectual calling, the other is by bringing them home to glory. The greater part {of the saints are} gathered home one after another at death, but the universal ingathering will be at the end of the world, all in soul and body. God will then bring home his saints to his own house, as the husbandman {gathers his} harvest {and brings it home} to his garner. [The souls of the saints will be] brought to heaven, that is especially the house of God. There those jewels shall be laid up as it were in golden cabinets, precious and glorious repositories.

3. [The saints shall be] laid up out of the way of all harm.

[(1)] Storms.

[(2)] Vermin.

[They shall be] infinitely above the reach of all.

4. He will as it were thenceforward solace himself in them. As the husbandman, after he has gathered in, enjoys and makes use [of his harvest]. God will then fully answer the purpose of his grace, in the use that he will make of his saints. He] will fully manifest his love. They shall fully enjoy God. The union and intercourse shall be perfect. They shall perfectly answer their end in glorifying {God}. God's complacence will be perfect. Zeph. 3:17, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." His inclination to communicate {his happiness and love} will be perfectly gratified. [God will have] perfect complacence in the beauty [of the saints].

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OBSERVATION IX.

God will hereafter cast away unsound professors.

[Unsound professors shall be] "cast out, and trodden under foot" [Matt. 5:13].

1. He will discover them, as to any special interest or relation. Some he will confess, Luke 12:8, Rev. 3:5. Matt. 7:23, "I will profess [unto them, I never knew you]." Matt. 25:12, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Luke 13:25-27, "[When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught us in our streets. But he shall
say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity]."

2. God will openly show that he has no value for them, and no delight in them. God don't [but] deal thus with false professors in general in this world. [They are called] reprobate. Jer. 6:30, "reprobate silver [shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them]." I Sam. 2:30, "[they that despise me shall be] lightly esteemed." Dan 12:2, "[And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and] everlasting contempt." Matt. 5:13, "[Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be] trodden under foot." Mic. 7:10, "[Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets]."

3. He will cast 'em away, as he will no more improve them to any honorable use or purpose.

4. They shall be visibly removed as it were to a great distance from God. Ps. 101:7, "[he that] telleth lies shall not stand in my sight." II Kgs. 23:27, "[I will] remove Judah out of my sight."

[They shall be] driven away. Prov. 14:32, "[The wicked man is] driven away in his wickedness." Job 18:18, "[He shall be] driven from light unto darkness." Luke 13:28, "[There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, and you yourselves] thrust out." Rev. 3:16, [God will] "spue them out of his [mouth]."

5. He will cast them away as to any regard to their welfare in this world. He will have no more to do with them in any way of favor. [He will] no more seek their welfare. [He will have] no compassion. [He will show] none of that care {that he has for the saints} towards wicked men while [they
continue so. He will show none of that care towards wicked men] which [he shows] towards the brute creatures.

Reason. They are fit for nothing else but to be cast out and destroyed.

APPLICATION.

[The] Use may be of Warning to all professors, to take heed that they ben't at last cast away.

There are no professors, whatever attainments in religion they are arrived at, and whatever evidences of their good effects they have, that are above such a caution. The apostle Paul did not think himself [above it]. I Cor. 9:27, "I myself should be a castaway." Therefore, let none slight this warning that is now given them, but take it as that which infinitely concerns them.

First. How many professors are cast away. There are multitudes of professors. Many seek to enter in. But Christ teaches [that the gate is strait that leads to heaven {Matt. 7:13-14}]. There are many called, but few are chosen, as Christ teaches in another place [Matt. 20:16, 22:14]. All must appear before him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and comparatively few will be then owned, and owned as some of those that are God's precious portion. There are many that have the charity and esteem of their neighbors, but God seeth not as man seeth. Luke 16:15,6 "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

Second. Consider what great disappointment the casting away of false professors will be attended with. False professors are like the foolish virgins [Matt. 25]. [They are] like the rich man [Matt. 19:16-24]. The day is coming when the wicked shall no longer stand in the congregation of the righteous, "but the way of the ungodly shall perish" [Ps. 1:5-6]. The dismal failing of the hope of the hypocrite, when called out of the world, is elegantly described. Job 8:11-19,
Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure. He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. His roots are wrapped about the heap, and seeth the place of stones. If he destroy him from his place, then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee. Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow.

Third. If you at last prove to have been a false professor, you will see the privilege of the true saints are admitted to, when you yourself are cast away. Luke 13:28-29, "[There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out]." Rev. 3:9, "to know that I have loved thee."

Fourth. You will then be more sensible of the worth of the privilege of such as are owned and treated as God's precious portion, than you are now. [You will] see how great God is. [You will] see all other things fail. [You will] see your need of God's favor. [You will see] what enemies and calamities you are exposed to.

Fifth. If the omniscient God, on your last trial, disowns you and casts you away, in vain will be your pleading former privileges and acquaintance. Luke 13:25-27, "When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. She shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."
Directions

1. Don't cast away divine things as worthy of no value or regard. Don't cast God behind your back. I Kgs. 14:9, thou "hast cast me behind they back." Ezek. 23:35, "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms." [Don't] bid the Most High [to] depart from you.

[Don't] make nothing of his perfection, the revelations that he has made of himself, the instructions that he has given. Don't cast away God's love, and treat his holy communion as worthy of no regard. Hos. 8:12, "counted as a strange thing." Don't make light of God's honor and glory. Don't "make a mock at sin," Prov. 14:9.

Don't let Christ be a stone set at nought by you, and cast away. [The] builders cast away {this stone, which is become the head of the corner}, his righteousness, Acts 4:11. Don't cast away the blessings of heaven.

2. Don't act as one that chooses distance and separation from God. Job 21:14, "Depart from us; we desire not [the knowledge of thy way.]"] Job 15:4, "he casteth off fear."

3. Don't as it were cast out the Spirit of God.

4. Don't cast yourself away. [Don't] sell your soul for a song.

5. Don't live so as to be good for nothing but to be cast forth and trodden under foot, Matt. 5:13, as salt that has lost its savor. Ṣ Wherewith shall it be salted?" [his] shows the more lamentable case of false professors than others. Take heed you ben't a barren tree in God's vineyard. [Don't] live without doing any good.

6. To your utmost, improve the day of God's mercy, while you are not as yet cast away.

7. See to it that you are upright in your profession, and in the duties you perform. Such shall never be cast away. Job. 8:20, "God will not cast away a perfect man."
Earnestly seek a better heart. Let that of the Psalmist, Ps. 19, three last verses, be your earnest and constant prayer: "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.
Notes

1 JE deletes: "Obs. 8. Hereafter God will gather the righteous unto him as a precious portion."
2 MS: "of."
3 MS: "with as."
4 JE had later inserted a reference to Zeph. 3:17 earlier in the paragraph without deleting this earlier one. The top of L. 8v. JE headed "Application" and began to write a Use of Examination, and then deleted it, apparently deciding to treat Obs. 8 and 9 in one Application. The next preaching unit begins on L. 9r.
5 MS: "visible."
6 MS cites v. 14.
7 This leaf is made from a discarded prayer bid, which reads:

William Clark desires that the goodness of god may be acknolged in the congregation for his grate goodness to him in preserving him in his Absence from home an in recovring him from dangris sickness and in returing of him hom in safty and his parence desire y" same