

God's High Thoughts.

Preached in the Baptist Church at Charlotetown, P. E. Island, Sunday evening, Feb. 28th, by the Pastor, Rev. G. R. White.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9.

What uplifting, what soul-cheering truth is here when applied to the dealings of God with his erring creatures, even "his own" disobedient children. For first in order, this whole message was addressed to God's chosen people who were now in bondage to the enemy. In the opening words of the chapter the prophet gives out God's great invitation to his thirsty people to come and drink from the fountains of divine mercy, and to drink freely, because of his special care for his own people sinful though they be: "Ho every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters." Israel was now in Babylon for her sin of idolatry; but she is weary and thirsty for her home and her God. If you have ever felt yourself away from God by wicked works, and separated from the fellowship of the saints, then you know how to pity Israel at this time. See how the pity of God overflows toward her so abundantly expressed by the prophet: "If we would grasp the whole situation or get any sort of an adequate meaning out of these words, we must try to picture to ourselves a whole host of people dying with thirst while they are trying to suck a little moisture out of the damp clouds of the ground, on the one hand, and on the other see a man standing at a little distance from them calling and pointing them to sparkling fountains of water, saying: "Ho every one that is thirsty come ye and drink from these life-giving fountains, for your God bids you come. Here is a full supply, and back of these fountains, and away up there in the heart of yonder mountain is a mighty reservoir full to the brim." Then we get some idea of what was in the mind of the prophet, concerning God's thought for his people then and now and forever.

And, as if all this were not enough, he backs it up with a great promise: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord who will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon." In the mythologies of the Greeks, they were said to have piled "Ossa on Pelion" (two small mountains) and to have rolled Ossa and Pelion up against Olympus, that they might see more clearly into the abode of the gods. So our prophet has piled promise upon invitation, that we may see more clearly the heart of our God. And upon the top of all this he puts the abundant statement of our text: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." The first question that will arise is, how much higher are the heavens than the earth? If you should climb to the top of the highest hills then stretch your hands up into the sky, the heavens will seem just a high as ever, and so they are. The astronomers tell us, that while light travels at the rapid rate of 186,000 miles per second, that it takes light eight minutes to come from the sun to the earth. But the sun is only a little higher than the earth. There are stars so distant, they tell us, that while light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles per second, that it takes the light many long years to reach our earth. But the heavens are still higher than the most distant stars. The thought of the prophet is, that there is no possible comparison between the greatness of God's mercy and that of the man—for the one is only finite, while the other is infinite.

The chosen people were now among the heathen, buying and selling as running tight bargains with their heathen neighbors, while God had great purposes of grace to work out through them, purposes as much higher than their present hopes and ambitions, as the heavens are higher than the earth. They were groveling in the dust of time and sense, when they should in thought and hope have been soaring aloft on the wings of faith. It was to inspire in them new and higher hopes that God sent them this new message regarding the largeness of his purpose and the constancy of his love. He is just the same today as he was in the days of the prophet—still mindful of his people; and we may apply this glorious statement of the text to ourselves. Today we see the sons of men struggling and fighting for the things that perish in the using, all too unmindful of the glories that are above. Like Bunyan's Pilgrim, so intent on the muck-rake that he could not look up or see the golden crown just above his head, which he might have had for an upward glance. At this time Israel had gotten so far from God that she had about concluded that God had utterly forsaken her and left her to perish in the land of the heathen. But not so. God never yet abandoned the soul, he never will. The child cannot understand how a parent can love and punish at the same time. Thus we are all too prone to think the same concerning God. But he chastens in love and not in anger—not for his pleasure but for our profit. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are God's ways higher than our ways. Here the prophet would widen out their thoughts and lift them up from their own narrow ways and thoughts to see the larger thought and purpose of God toward them. Now apply this great truth from any standpoint you please and you will see its fulness and be helped.

First, Apply it to the patience of God: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth," so is the patience of God higher than the patience of men. Anything but eternal patience would have been exhausted long ago with your sins and mine. One of the great Bible pictures of divine patience is given in Rev. 3:20: "Behold I stand at the door and knock." One of the great painters has given us a picture of this verse. It is that of a man standing at a door, late at night, knocking for admittance, while his locks are wet with the dews of night; but the door is fastened on the inside, and can only be opened by those within. This door is the human heart. This represents the patience of God dealing with the sinner. If you would listen, you would hear Christ at the door of your heart to-night. And what old rickety doors Jesus stands before. Many of these homes and hearts are so foul that only Jesus would enter. We like the priest, pass by on the other side. Some of you here to-night know that Christ is now at the door of your heart but you will not let him in—admirable patience is his. Suppose you go to the home of a neighbor with some good news, but they refuse to let you in, and you should hear them say let him knock away, we do not want him in here now. Your patience would go to smash on that rock, and you would turn away saying when I go there again those people will know it." That is just the way many of you here to-night are treating Christ my Lord. If his patience were not as much higher than yours, as the heavens are higher than the earth, you would have been left without hope long since. But there he stands. Listen! Do you not hear a knock! That's the Saviour, let him in—"Oh let the blessed Saviour in."

O lovely attitude! he stands
With melting heart and laden hands:
O matchless kindness and he shows
This matchless kindness to his foes.

The knell of that knocking Christ will follow you to all eternity, for weal or woe, as you obey or disobey the heavenly knocker. My friend, spurn not the high patience of God.

Again, apply the thought of the text to the abundance of God's pardon for sin. We often find it hard to get forgiveness from men. After much pleading and asking, after we have assured them, that their dignity will not be marred, and they will not compromise their position, they will say, "Well I will forgive, but one cannot forget." But that talk side by side with the rich pardon of God, pardon urged upon the guilty, and you will see the force of the prophet's illustration. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's thoughts and ways higher than ours. For God can both forgive and forget. "Thou wilt cast all their sins in the depths of the sea." For I will forgive their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more." How abundantly Jesus pardoned while on earth. You remember the poor leper who came to Jesus all reeking in the foulness of disease, and kneeling before the Christ he said: "If thou wilt 'Thou canst make clean," Jesus replied, "I will, be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed." You remember the care of the woman who was a sinner and as the Pharisees pressed her upon him for judgment, for such were to be stoned by the law of Moses. Jesus said: "he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The whole guilty crew soon went out under such a withering rebuke. And when alone with the sinner, Jesus said: "Where are those thing accusers? hath no man condemned thee?" She said: "no man Lord," and Jesus said, unto her neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be whiter than snow, though red like crimson they shall be as wool. How hard for a fallen one to be restored by men. Magdalene, must not pose as a saint though all her sins have been forgiven her by her dear Lord. If she does she will soon be told that while forever, she is a sinner all the same, pardoned but a sinner nevertheless. I do not say that society is altogether wrong, society must protect herself, and she has no grace to spare. For society herself stands on a very narrow ledge of rock, while the seething, boiling waters of swift destruction roll at her feet—no room for crowding here; "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." But if society hugs the pardoned sinner too closely she may be charged with the same guilt herself. We will be told again and again that Magdalene had seven devils cast out of her, and many of our good people in this town think there are seven more to come out yet, be careful how you mix with her. But Jesus knew that the last devil had been dislodged, and he received her into full fellowship.

What a mercy we deal with God and not with men in this matter of pardon—this is our only hope. Men are slow to pardon; they never quite do it to the full. The sinner may sit on a stove, but never again on a chair, lest he taint us too. Let a man fall from the pulpit, and let him try to get back again, perhaps he should never try, but he will find the task all but impossible. Perhaps it is one of the safe-guards that this road is made so hard. I am not writing in small form such a sin; but it is illustrative of the smallness of man's pardon, when put by the side of God's abundant pardon. God's pardon is like the sunbeam, it purifies all it touches while itself remains pure. You remember Hetty Sorrel, in "Adam Bede," as told by George Elliot. Poor "Hetty," she was more foolish than wicked and wicked because so foolish. Yet George Elliot trampled

her, crushed her from start to finish—from the day of her sin to the day of her banishment. Hetty found no place with her for repentance, though she sought carefully and with tears. George Elliot did not believe in a new opportunity. She had no gospel. Bear your shame, take the consequence of your deeds, is her cold hard theology. But she made one of her characters utter a golden truth when she said: "It is not worth doing wrong for, nothing in this world is." Many think poor Hetty, was George Elliot herself, and in "Hetty" is her own sin "written large." How small is all human pardon, God's towers as high above man's as the heavens tower above the earth. Only the prophets inspired illustration meets the case—a sort of divine hyperbole. There is only one remedy that can meet man's need by way of pardon and that is the gospel of Christ. "How can this do it?" I can't tell you how, only it does. The philosophy of the cross is a mystery, but a fact. Christ can and will pardon sinners. And only the high pardon of God in Christ can overtop willful sin, and put away plotted iniquity, of which we are all more or less guilty.

If you should see a man down on the ice in our Charlotetown harbor, making a fire in the midst of that field of ice, and he should say I am going to melt away all this ice you would say your task is simply impossible, you can never do that my friend. It would be illustrative of man's inability to pardon sin or save sinners. But just you wait until God gets at that ice—wait until April, wait until the great sun shall swing himself farther north and pours his more perpendicular rays upon that field of ice, then silently but surely it will melt away. That is illustrative of God's power to pardon sin. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth," so is God's power to pardon higher than man's. "Whose God is like unto our God, our enemies themselves being judges.

In the last place I wanted to pull up by the side of this great illustrative text, the love of God as manifested toward sinners, and let you see, that his love also is as high above all human love, as the heavens are high above the earth. I wanted to do this in the hope that some poor sin-sick soul, some prodigal might be led again to the Fathers Home. But my time is about gone. In a closing word, let me say that this is a wide truth we have touched upon this evening and you may apply the doctrine of the text in all the ways and works of God, and you will find it everlastingly true: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways and thoughts higher than ours." Come then my friend, surrender your thirsty, sin-sick soul to this great and good God, and drink henceforth from the rivers of his pleasure. Tonight give this high God your heart, and he will give you more than a father's guidance: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so is the guidance of God superior to that of an earthly father. Give this high God your ways and he will overarch his path for you as the heavens overarch the fields and the flowers. Give him but the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and he will give you mercy like the wisdom of the sea. Give to one of his little ones but a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, and he will give you a drink from the river of the water of life. My friend take this great text with you as a balm for your wounded spirit, take it with you as a divine cordial for all your fears. For God speaks to you from out these words and this is what he says to you, "Fear not." For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Amen and amen.

From Maine.

EDITOR MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

Dear Brother.—We rejoice to learn from reliable sources that your own health is slowly if surely improving, and your many friends are anxious that your physical strength may be fully returned and that you may long be spared to carry on your important work in behalf of the denomination of which the MESSENGER AND VISITOR is the accredited organ as well as the other great interests involved.

We are glad also to learn that, although the winter has been a very hard one rendering special or even regular services, a work of great inconvenience and difficulty in the major part of our churches, yet the ingathering in many sections has been unusually large and encouraging to the faithful ones who are willing to put forth extra efforts and spend a few extra dollars in evangelistic work.

In Maine the trend of thought, desire and purpose has been in this one direction. State Conventions, County Associations, Quarterly meetings, etc., have all emphasized the importance of thorough evangelistic work in all of our churches. Many good things have been said and much prayer has been offered, and God has quickened his servants and revival influences are being experienced and gratefully enjoyed.

Rev. J. F. Ford so well known to your readers is in the midst of a gracious work in the fine town of Houlton. Rev. S. Belyea, in his new field, Booklyn on the Penobscot Bay has also enjoyed a rich in gathering. Bro. DeCoverance, a special state evangelist, has been in different towns