

to his fellow-men. For prisoners we all are; but prisoners of hope, while life and health and gospel privileges are still granted. And we offer to each of you a full, a complete and sufficient refuge, into which you are invited to turn.

In further directing your attention to these words, let us,

1st. Consider the character in which men are addressed in the words before us—"Prisoners of hope."—And,

2ndly. The admonition given—"Turn ye to the strong hold."

We are, then, first to notice the character in which men are addressed in the words before us: "Prisoners of hope." The prophet could hardly have adopted an appellation more expressive or more appropriate. Man, in more senses than one, is a prisoner. All things around him are calculated to remind him that he is not free, that he is not his own master, that he dwells not in the land of perfect liberty. This earthly body is, in one sense, his prison. The immaterial soul is confined in this narrow cell; weakness, sickness, infirmity and decay, all remind him that he is not free, that he is in a state of confinement. The spirit feels its imprisonment, and "groans," as the apostle says, "being burdened;" it longs to be at liberty, and seeks to soar upward; it longs, with the Psalmist, "O that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest." But this clayey tabernacle detains it; it is clogged with a feeble, decaying body, possessed only of limited powers and limited strength. Like a bird, swift on wing but confined in a cage, it pines, and pines in vain, to recover its liberty.

But man is also in another sense a prisoner—he is the prisoner of sin. These earthly bodies which we carry about with us are not merely confined and limited in their powers,—they are also defiled, corrupt, and sinful in their propensities. "God hath concluded" (or shut up) "all under sin," says the apostle. "He that committeth sin is the servant," or slave or captive, "of sin." Thus we are said to have "our understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in us." Man has "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity

to the law of sin which is in his members." Sin drags him down to earth with a constraining force. Man will often, indeed talk of his freedom and his liberty, and cry, "Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?" But is he, therefore, really free? A free man and yet the slave of lust, the slave of his appetites, the slave of his passions! Is his understanding free? Are his affections free? Is his conscience free? Are his hands free! Are his powers of body and mind a liberty to walk in the path of God's commandments with a perfect heart! No, my friends, sin is holding dominion over him; sin is chaining down the soul to earth; sin is exercising a mighty, powerful, and prevailing influence over his heart. The whole race of man, formed after the image of God, endued with heavenly powers and spiritual capacities, yet all are under sin; all are condemned; all are under the sentence of divine wrath; all are bound by the fetters of corruption,—fetters which they can never break,—fetters from which they can never be free, until a strength greater than their own bursts the chain and sets the prisoners at liberty.

And then, once more, we are also *prisoners*, as being the captives of Satan. Satan acts the part of a jailor to guard the prison and prevent the prisoners from breaking loose. Thus he is called by our Lord "The strong man armed," and elsewhere, "the prince of the power of the air." Thus man is said to be taken captive by him at his will. Satan is represented as entangling him in his snare, as catching him in his net, as blinding his eyes, and hardening his heart, and preventing one ray of light from entering his soul; and thus holding him in the bondage of corruption. True it is that Satan gilds the chain and deludes the man with vain appearances of liberty. The worldling boasts that he is his own master, and professes to pay the servant of God, who is debarred and confined from pleasures which he enjoys. But, my friends, the reverse of this is really the case; the man of this world is really the prisoner, the slave, the deluded victim. The believer is the man who may be said truly to have escaped the snare of the fowler, and to be now free from the dominion of sin and Satan.