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SERMON

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REV. MALCOLM N. McLAREN,

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SERMON.

REVELATION i. 16.

And he had in his right hand seven stars.

It belongs to Christianity, not to exempt her votaries *from* tribulation, but to enable them to rejoice *in* tribulation. Persecution may drive the followers of Christ from the spot that is most endeared to them; from the friends with whom they have taken sweet counsel; from the privileges in which they have been accustomed to rejoice; but it can never banish them from the throne of the heavenly grace, or close against them the fountain of spiritual strength and comfort. The Apostle John, for his steadfast adherence to the Christian faith, had been banished by the emperour Domitian to the isle of Patmos—a dreary and barren speck of land that rose

out of the Mediterranean sea. Here he was indeed cut off from many of his accustomed privileges, and especially from all intercourse with those who had been his companions in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ; but amidst all that solitude he was far enough from being alone — amidst all that desolation, far enough from being unhappy. The spirit of devotion found alimant in every object that met his eye; in every sound that vibrated upon his ear. The skies hanging over him in their glory; the waves dashing around him in their fury; the winds now breathing their gentle and refreshing influence, and now gathering an unwonted strength, and searching the cavities of the rocks; — all, all, spoke to him of the greatness and grandeur of the Creator. That desolate island, in becoming a place of exile to a saint, became a temple to the living God; and then, perhaps for the first time, was opened a reciprocal communication between it and the third Heavens, Jehovah's peculiar residence.

There are those, and professed christians too, with whom the keeping of the Sabbath seems to be a mere matter of expediency;

and who will often plead the peculiar circumstances in which they are placed, as a reason for not keeping it at all. But no such unworthy policy as this marked the character of this exiled Apostle. Notwithstanding he was on a desolate island, where no influence could be felt from his example, when the Sabbath came round, he remembered it, to keep it holy. And in keeping it he found a rich reward; for that divine Master who had permitted him to lean upon his bosom while he was on earth, now gives him a signal evidence that he has lost none of his affection for him from having returned to Heaven; for he condescends to commune with him, as he had done with no other individual, in respect to the things that are to be; he gives a prophetic outline of the whole history of providence, through all coming generations to the final consummation; and directs that it should be dedicated to the seven churches of Asia. But before recording this wonderful revelation, the Apostle describes in a few words the singularly glorious appearance of the Personage from whom he received it. He represents him as "one like unto the Son of

Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars. And out of his mouth went a sharp, two edged sword; and his countenance was as the Sun shineth in his strength.”

The seven stars mentioned in our text, are, in a subsequent verse, explained by the Saviour himself, to mean the angels, or presiding ministers, of the seven churches. In this discourse we shall consider them as emblematical of the Christian ministry in general; and shall inquire what agency of the Saviour in respect to the ministry is intended, by his holding the stars in his right hand.

1. We are to contemplate the Christian ministry under the emblem of STARS.

It may be proper, however, before we proceed with this analogy, to say that the emblem under which the character of ministers is here represented, makes no allowance for the

infirmities and imperfections to which they are subject: strictly speaking, it contemplates them rather as what they *ought* to be than as what they *are*. In like manner, the word *saints*, which would seem to imply a perfectly spotless character, is used in Scripture as descriptive of those who, though they have been the subjects of a regenerating influence, are yet the subjects of much remaining corruption. When believers find themselves represented as *saints*, it should make them humble that they sustain so imperfectly that exalted character; and when ministers find themselves represented as *stars*, they should, to say the least, find an equal cause for humility, in the fact that they give out so feeble and inconstant a light.

What are some of the points in respect to which Christ's ministers may be likened unto stars?

1. The stars are *luminous* bodies; and it belongs to ministers præeminently, that they shine as lights in the world.

Light is an emblem of *holiness* — “Let your light so shine before men,” said our Saviour, referring evidently to the virtues and graces

of christians — “that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in Heaven.”

Holiness is essential to the character of every true professor of christianity; for what else is implied in a christian profession, than a belief of the truth, and a subjection to the truth — the two leading elements of a holy character? But if this be necessary to every christian professor — necessary as a matter of consistency, of comfort, of usefulness, — how peculiarly necessary to one, whose official duty it is to endeavour to turn others from sin to holiness! How necessary too that he should possess this attribute in an eminent degree; that it should be so prominent in his character, that no one can think of successfully bringing it into question! Let a minister possess whatever other qualifications for his work he may; let him have the learning of Paul, and the eloquence of Apollos; let him be the accomplished gentleman, and even the generous and sympathizing friend; if he be not a *holy* man — I may add an *eminently* holy man — he certainly lacks the crowning attribute of a christian minister.

No doubt the ministry depends more for its efficiency, as well as its dignity, upon this, than any thing else; and just in proportion as any thing else is substituted in place of this, we must expect that the church will be given up to the curse of barren ordinances.

But light is an emblem of *knowledge* as well as holiness. In this sense the prophet uses the word when he says, "To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no *light* in it."

It is a dictate of common sense that no one is qualified to be a teacher, who has not a competent knowledge of the subject on which he professes to teach. But ministers are officially teachers on the most practical, the most momentous, of all the subjects that ever engaged the attention of man. Philosophy is a noble study; and so is history; and so is each of the natural sciences; but when compared with theology, in the extent and the magnitude of their relations, they dwindle into insignificance. And can it be supposed that a man is qualified to teach this most profound, this most sublime, of all sciences,

while yet he has himself never penetrated beneath the surface of it? Let the quack trifle with human life, if you will, by permitting him to prescribe for diseases of which he has no knowledge; let your equitable claims be defeated, by being entrusted to the management of a miserable pettifogger, who knows not his right hand from his left in matters of law; in short, let ignorance be tolerated in any other department of human action, but let it not be tolerated here: let me never sit as a learner in the school of Christ at the feet of one, who needs himself to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God.

It is worthy of remark that the knowledge which is requisite in a minister, is not merely the knowledge of abstract theological truth, but of the practical bearings and relations of truth, as it stands connected with human experience. An individual may have his mind stored with the general principles of medical science, and yet, if he have neglected to consider these principles in their practical application to the human constitution, no one

would say that he was qualified for medical practice. And, in like manner, there may be a great amount of theological learning, without the ability to apply it to practical purposes; without even a perception of the adaptedness of christian truth to man's moral wants; and in this case, it is evident that the knowledge that is wanting, is absolutely necessary to render that which is possessed, of much practical utility. There is perhaps no species of knowledge but may be rendered either directly or indirectly tributary to a minister's usefulness; but that which is *most* important is gathered directly from the study of the Bible, and from his experience of the power of the truth upon his own heart. There are many subjects of which a man may be ignorant, and yet be a safe and useful teacher in divine things; but if he be ignorant of the Bible, he will substitute error for truth — darkness for light; if he be a stranger to the practical influence of divine truth in healing his own moral maladies, in meeting his own moral wants, he may indeed wield the sword of the Spirit, but he will wield it at random; he may distribute the bread of life, but he

will never give to each his portion in due season.

I say, then, ministers are to shine as the stars, in respect to the cultivation both of holiness and knowledge. And they are not to be satisfied with exhibiting any given amount of lustre ; but they are to shine more and more unto the perfect day. They are always to be aiming at higher degrees of conformity to the divine will ; at higher attainments in the knowledge of divine truth, till death finishes their course, and transfers them from the scene of their labour to the scene of their reward.

2. The stars are *useful* bodies : they shine for the benefit of the world. They assist the mariner to regulate his course across the pathless ocean. In the absence of the sun and moon, they are like lamps to the world hung out from the evening sky. They declare the glory of the Creator, and awaken in the contemplative and devout mind sentiments of reverence and gratitude toward Him. And if I may borrow light from philosophy, I may add, also, that no doubt each of them is the dwelling place of immortal beings ; garnished

with exquisite beauty and magnificence, and fitted to be a theatre for sublime researches into the works and ways of God.

In like manner, Christ's ministers are to live and labour, not chiefly for their own benefit, but for the benefit of their fellow men. Is the sinner at ease in the indulgence of his vicious propensities, and madly rushing upon the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler — the minister is to persuade him, in view of the terrors of the Lord, to forsake his evil ways. Is the sinner beginning to awake to his condition, and inquire whether it be possible that he should escape from the wrath to come — the minister is to point him to Jesus Christ, not only as an evidence that his escape is possible, but as the way by which it is to be effected. Have the agonies of conviction given place to the consolations of hope; and is the soul that was just now oppressed with the burden of its own iniquities, asking with astonishment and rapture, "Is it possible that, after all, I have found Jesus?" — the minister is to encourage him to rejoice only with trembling; and to beware of all the delusions of false experience. Is the christian a wan-

derer from the path of duty — has he temporarily forgotten that the vows of God are upon him; or are the evidences of his adoption clouded, and is he beginning despairingly to say, “Oh that it were with me as in months that are past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my tabernacle;” or are temptations clustering about him in an unusual degree, and is he in danger of forgetting where his strength lies; or is there making ready for him some furnace of affliction, in which nothing but a strong confidence in God can sustain him — it is for the minister to meet him with appropriate counsel, admonition, encouragement, in all these various circumstances; to do his utmost to build him up in the most holy faith, and render his course brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. In short, a minister’s life is to be devoted præeminently to the interests of others. Like the Master whom he serves, he is to go about doing good.

But the usefulness of ministers is not to be confined within the immediate sphere in which their efforts are put forth — as the stars which are scattered over the canopy of

heaven, send an illuminating influence to this distant world, so the benign influence of ministers may and ought to be felt, in climes which they have never visited; upon souls which they will never meet, till they meet them in the judgment. Let any minister, especially at the period in which we live, discharge with fidelity the appropriate duties of his station, and he will make himself felt to the ends of the earth. Blessed be the office of a missionary; but it has come to pass in our day that men need not all be missionaries in order to do work in heathen lands. You may stay at home and labour in your own parishes till you die, and yet some of the noblest results of your labours may be realized in Nova Zembla or Cape Horn, or the remotest islands of the sea. You may offer prayers in your closet, you may form plans in your study, you may preach sermons in your pulpit, of which no report shall ever be conveyed to a solitary pagan; and yet those prayers, those plans, those sermons, may exert an influence, that shall cause *multitudes* of pagans, in view of the revelations of the

judgment, to hail you as their everlasting benefactor.

My brethren, I would to God that our minds were more completely occupied with the one great and glorious thought of being useful; of fulfilling the purpose of our ministry in the salvation of our fellow men, and the extension of Christ's kingdom. You and I are heirs to the same flesh and blood, the same infirmities and corruptions and temptations, as those are to whom we minister; and there is danger, even while we profess to realize our office in all its responsibilities, that we shall pervert it to purposes of criminal self-indulgence. There is danger lest, from shrinking timidity or undue caution, we should keep the more alarming truths of the Bible in the background — should incur the charge brought by the prophet, of daubing with untempered mortar. There is danger lest we indulge our peculiar tastes, at the expense of blunting the edge of the sword of the Spirit; preaching the truth indeed, but preaching it indistinctly, or out of its due proportions. There is danger lest we let

opportunities slip for doing good ; lest, from inattention or indifference, we suffer the seed time to pass, either in respect to individuals or our congregations at large, and then look in vain for a harvest. There is danger lest our instructions from the pulpit lose their weight by being silently compared with our conversation in the world, and that those who hear us preach, will not believe us in earnest then, because they see so little in us that looks like religious earnestness at any other time. There is danger in general that the influence which our office secures to us, and which *should* be directed entirely to the promotion of the best interests of our fellow men, will be used chiefly for purposes of worldly gratification. And just so far as this takes place, we surely defeat the design of the ministry ; we are worse than barren trees in the Lord's vineyard. I say, then, let us hold to our minds the thought that our vocation is attended with multiplied dangers ; and that it becomes us to forget every thing else in the one idea of faithfully serving our Master. Human applause dies away upon the breath by which it is uttered. The laurels of earthly distinc-

tion wither as soon as they are plucked. We may live in the sunshine of ease; in the smiles of the worldly; in the sound of our own praise; but in the last hour we shall need something to sustain us, that the recollection of all this will not supply. I feel that the current of life is ebbing away; and that in a few moments more, I must surrender my commission as a minister, and give up my account. And now what is there that can prevent these last moments from being moments of agony? Plaudits of my fellow men, I care not for you! Stations of honour and influence, I care not for you! But if here, lingering in the twilight of life, I can contemplate monuments of real usefulness; if I can see the wilderness which I have cultivated beginning to blossom as the rose; if I can call to mind how grace has triumphed in my weakness, rendering my poor labours instrumental of turning many from darkness to light; in short, if it may be my privilege to reflect that I have been in some humble degree a *useful* minister of Jesus Christ; this is all that my heart desires—I can plant myself now upon the

promise of God, and die amidst visions of heavenly glory.

3. The stars are *conspicuous* bodies. This results necessarily from the position which they occupy. They lie scattered on the heavens above us; and we have only to lift up our eyes to behold them. The depths of the ocean over which we sail, the bowels of the earth on which we walk, are hid from us; but every unclouded evening brings the stars within the range of every one's vision.

In like manner, ministers of the gospel occupy a station which brings them prominently within the observation of the world. They are not all indeed *equally* the objects of publick observation; for some occupy more elevated places, and move in wider spheres, than others; but *every* minister — no matter what his circumstances may be — has the eyes of the world, in no inconsiderable degree, upon him. He professes more than others; and more is expected from him than from others. If he fulfil his ministry with fidelity, he does it in the face of the world; and multitudes take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus. If he falter in duty, if he show him-

self indifferent to the spiritual interests of his fellow men, if he think to play the minister in the pulpit and the worldling in the world, if not only his ministerial but his christian and moral character lie bleeding from self-inflicted wounds — here, again, the noon-day sun shines upon all his delinquencies; the world take knowledge of him indeed; but not that he has been with Jesus, in any other sense, than *he* was with him who betrayed him. He is still a star—conspicuous, though not luminous.

My brethren, if there is a single point of ministerial duty which it becomes us deeply to ponder, and the neglect of which puts in jeopardy, or I should rather say effectually prevents, our general usefulness, sure I am that it is this to which I am now directing your attention. And let me say that, in order that this melancholy effect should be produced, it is not necessary that a minister should *fall* in the technical sense of the word — that is, that he should commit some flagrant deed of immorality, that shall shock the sensibilities of the whole community in which he lives — no, he may do no one par-

ticular act which, taken by itself, shall seem likely materially to impair his influence; and yet the general tenour of his life may be such as to give to his ministerial duties the complexion of a farce. I would not desire, either in my general or pastoral intercourse, to assume any austere or artificial airs; I would not, on suitable occasions, repress the warm glow of social feeling; I would not be in a perpetual quarrel with the nature that God has given me, endeavouring to move by rule, and smile by rule, and work myself into something which He never intended I should be: but I would earnestly desire that I may always bear in mind that those who see me *in* the pulpit cannot forget what I am *out* of it; I would remember the wise man's declaration that "every thing is beautiful in his place;" I would covet most that consistency of character, in which cheerfulness never degenerates into levity, or seriousness into gloom. I would deprecate as one of the greatest of all evils, to have an audience before me whose consciences were disposed to recognize the truth which I delivered, but whose memories were stored with facts in

respect to my daily deportment, which neutralized the power of conscience, and made the truth pass for nothing. My brother, seest thou the stars in the heavens, looking down upon the whole world? There is another firmament in which you and I are stars; and whether we take note of the world or not, *they* are gazing at *us*, with a view to decide whether we are really the stars which Christ will acknowledge, or those wandering stars which go off into perpetual darkness.

4. The stars are either *fixed* or *planetary*; — they either retain the same position, or perform certain stated revolutions. In like manner, some of Christ's ministers have their particular stations allotted them, and possibly through life serve the same congregation; while others occupy different stations, or perhaps can scarcely be said ever to be settled in any station.

No one can doubt that Infinite Wisdom hath displayed itself in the constitution of the pastoral relation; — in the appointment of particular individuals to take the oversight of particular churches. The advantages of this constitution appear in the mutual interest and

affection which it awakens and cherishes between ministers and people; in the greater effect which is thereby given to his ministrations; and in the general stability and dignity which it imparts to the whole economy of the church. Blot out a stated ministry; and if the church survives the shock, she will be shorn of her beauty and her strength. Do any thing to lessen the influence of such a ministry; and you do just so much to impair the energies of the church, and to introduce confusion and misrule.

But still it is manifest that the Head of the church never intended that *all* ministers should be stationary; for this would be inconsistent with the fulfilment of the commission which He himself gave to his Apostles. The tenour of that commission was not — Sit *you* down and establish a church here in Jerusalem; and go *you* and establish another at Athens; and *you* another at Rome; and remain there till you die, and let all that you do be done within that narrow sphere; but it was “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature;” pass from country to country, and scatter the seed of the word

as you move onward, and rest not from your missionary labours, till Heaven opens to welcome you to *its* rest and its reward. And in the prosecution of this work originally committed by our Saviour to his Apostles, there always has been a demand for missionary labour, and always will be, till the work shall be accomplished. Hence it devolves upon the church to raise up men for the specific purpose of carrying abroad the gospel; and though they may be, to some extent, stationary, even in this work, yet they will almost of course find it necessary to occupy, at different periods, different fields of labour. And I would be far from intimating that it is necessarily wrong, even in a christian land and in christian society, for a man to hold the ministerial office without a stated charge; for some men, I doubt not, are eminently qualified for itinerant labour, who would accomplish but little as stated pastors. If Whitefield, for instance, had been shut up within the limits of a single parish, instead of having the world for his field, how much would have been lost to the church, and how much lost from the lustre of his immortal crown!

I have said that some of the stars perform their stated revolutions ; but let it be remembered that they revolve in perfect harmony : one star never crowds another out of its course, or interferes with the general order of the system. And so it *should* be with ministers who are not confined to any one field of labour. Especially if they labour here and there in fields which are cultivated by other men ; — if, from any particular qualifications they may possess, or from any other cause, the church has consented to recognize them as *occasional* labourers ; it becomes them specially to take heed that they conduct with exemplary caution ; that they attempt no unreasonable interference with the wishes and plans of the stated pastor ; and that they leave him, so far as this can be effected by their instrumentality, more strongly entrenched in the affections of his people than they found him. But the fact is not to be disguised, that an itinerant ministry has too often been, in these latter years, prolific of serious evil. It has happened, I know not how often, that a minister of this description, has gained access to some other man's charge,

with a view professedly to aid him in his work, but really to take the work altogether into his own hands. What he has had to say, has come, not in the form of a suggestion, but of a mandate. If the pastor has obeyed, well; but disobedience, even hesitation, has been the signal for his being denounced as a heartless, faithless, godless minister. And this denunciation has presently begun to be responded to by many of his own people; and amidst the din of zeal has been heard the din of party strife; and Fanaticism has been there worshipping God in irreverent prayers, and Censoriousness has been there dealing out upon sober christians its bitter calumnies, under pretence of fidelity to the Master; and in due time, he who a little while before found a united church, has retired and left a distracted one; and at a little later period, the pastor himself has withdrawn, not from a predisposition to abandon his charge, but because the tempest has actually swept him away. If you would imagine any similitude on the face of the heavens, to the scenes to which I refer, you must suppose the planetary bodies to be shooting here and there with

frightful irregularity, and in their wild and erratic movements, not only to come in collision with each other, but with the fixed stars — to remove them from the places which Omnipotence had assigned to them, and even to threaten the disruption of the tie that holds the universal system together.

5. Once more: One star *differeth* from another star in glory; and there is a corresponding diversity among the ministers of Christ.

Ministers differ in their *intellectual powers and accomplishments*. Here there is an Edwards or a Butler, trained to the most profound and discriminating research; *there* is a Hall or a Mason, the grandeur of whose conceptions throws the thoughts of common minds into the shade; and yonder, standing alone, I had almost said in the world's entire history — is a Whitefield, who is familiar with avenues to the heart which others have not explored; who can raise a tempest in the bosom when he will, and as quickly speak it into a calm; while the great multitude shine with inferior but different degrees of lustre. There is a difference in their *moral constitutions*. The unshrinking boldness of Paul, the headstrong

impetuosity of Peter, the winning gentleness of John, the docile spirit of Nathaniel, and every other variety of natural disposition, is continually exemplified in the christian ministry. There is a difference in the amount of *piety* which they possess; some keeping the world always under their feet, and having their conversation habitually in Heaven, while others seem scarcely to rise to the ordinary level of christian attainment. They are favoured also with different degrees of *usefulness*; and their usefulness flows in different *channels*. One exerts an influence in advancing the kingdom of Christ which is felt far and wide; while another, with feebler powers and less zeal and perseverance, would seem to labour to comparatively little purpose. One is directly instrumental of turning many to righteousness, and there are hundreds and even thousands who expect to heap blessings upon him in Heaven as the instrument of their salvation; while another exerts a more silent but scarcely less important influence, in vindicating the claims of Christianity, in moulding the character of the young, in guarding the general interests of the church. And to

crown all, they differ in their ultimate *reward*. They that have been faithful in a few things will not *lose* their reward; but they that have turned many to righteousness will shine as the brightness of the firmament.

Such is the variety which the great Head of the Church permits — I may say, has ordained, in the christian ministry. And the *wisdom* of this appointment, especially in regard to the different intellectual and moral constitutions of ministers, is as manifest as its existence; for the ministry has to perform its work upon every variety of character, and the influence which might be entirely lost upon one individual, might operate with mighty power upon another. Hence I cannot think it desirable that all ministers should try to force themselves into a conformity to any one particular standard: indeed, that seems to me to be doing violence to the divine constitution. God requires indeed that all his ministers should preach the same great truths — should be governed by the same great principles; but He has not required that they should all be of the temperament of Peter, or of John, or of Paul: he chooses to have his

sons of thunder and his sons of consolation ; and no one may say which class he regards with the greater degree of favour. I have sometimes heard even ministers complain of their brethren as likely to accomplish little or no good by their preaching, because, though they preached the truths of the gospel plainly, they preached them with less energy, or less apparent fervour than could be desired. But I would say in all such cases, you have no right to require the brick where God has not given the straw ; and besides, the very mode of preaching which you desire, would doubtless be far less acceptable and far less useful to many individuals, than that to which you object. Let a minister keep himself within those bounds of decorum which God's word and the dignity of his own office prescribe, and the more closely he follows the bent of his own mind, the better : he may not be a Paul or an Apollos, a Chalmers or a Dwight ; but he will be *himself* ; and in that most natural and appropriate of all characters, he will be likely to do his Master's work in the best manner, and with the greatest success. I pass to the

II. Second general topic of remark, viz : —
 The AGENCY which our text attributes to the Saviour in respect to his ministers. What are we to understand by his *holding the stars in his right hand* ?

The *right hand* is an emblem of power — “Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power.” It is an emblem of *wisdom* — “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning,” or her art. It is an emblem of *dignity* — “Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Holding the stars in his right hand, then, implies that he preserves them by his power ; guides them by his wisdom ; and confers upon them peculiar honour.

1. He *preserves* them by his power.

He preserves them *as a distinct body*. The church under each successive dispensation, has had an order of men set apart for the performance of religious offices ; — for communicating religious instruction and conducting religious worship. Abraham was a prophet, and Melchizedek a priest, under the patriarchal dispensation ; Moses was a prophet, and Aaron a priest, under the Jewish dispensation ; and

under the present and yet more glorious dispensation, there is the christian ministry — an order of men commissioned to act as ambassadors of Christ, and overseers of the church. And as this appointment is of divine origin, and dates back in some form from the very beginning of the church, we must suppose that it is indispensable to the accomplishment of the divine purpose in the establishment of the church; and hence we find that provision is made for the perpetuity of this institution to the end of time. There have been seasons when to any other eye than that of faith, the permanence of the christian ministry must have appeared, I will not say doubtful, but absolutely impracticable. For instance, when the only provision for propagating the gospel was bound up within the narrow compass of our Lord's immediate family, and *they* discouraged and heart-broken in view of his recent death, what worldly wisdom could have seen in them the germ of an institution that was to spread itself over the world, and last till the final consummation? And after the church had corrupted her way by mingling with the world; and after the ministry had become completely

transformed into an engine of spiritual despotism; how improbable did it seem then upon all the principles of human calculation, that she would ever recover the grace and spirituality of her youth; that she would carry her victories of truth and love to the ends of the earth! And at a later period, you remember how the Devil came forth in the person of Voltaire and his coadjutors and successors, with the desperate purpose of banishing the christian ministry, and Christianity along with it, from the world: but though he came in the appropriate livery of the pit; though he spread desolation all around him, as if the clouds were raining torrents of blood, and the earth heaving forth surges of fire, yet the church survived, the ministry survived; and he went back to hell in the ignominy of defeat; and the poor old wretch who had been his chief agent grew tired of his work at last; and if traditionary accounts can be relied on, died with throes of agony in his heart — with burning curses upon his lips. Yes, Brethren, in spite of all the opposition that has been made against the christian ministry, it always *has* existed; in

spite of all the opposition that will hereafter be made against it, it *will* exist to the end of time. The Saviour's promise — the Saviour's power, is pledged. Not till Infidelity can reach forth and pluck from their spheres the stars which adorn the evening sky, may she hope to blot out those stars which the Saviour holds in his right hand.

But not only does Jesus preserve the christian ministry as a distinct body, but he also preserves *each individual* just so long as his infinite wisdom sees to be best. Sometimes he exhibits his adorable sovereignty and pours contempt upon our calculations, by forming and polishing some instrument with exquisite skill, as if it were designed for the accomplishment of the most important purposes on earth, and then taking it immediately to himself, to be used for yet higher purposes in Heaven. You remember the brief history of Spencer, of Summerfield, of Larned. They were all stars that had but just appeared above the horizon; but they arose in brilliancy; and those who beheld them, expected that the world would for many years rejoice in their lustre. But He

who held them in his hand, transplanted them one by one, while they had yet but just begun to shine upon the world, to a more glorious firmament. Nevertheless, He has caused others to rise and take their places; and they in due time will be removed to make way for others still; and thus the succession will continue till all who have shone as stars upon earth, shall shine with far brighter glory in the third Heavens. We send abroad our missionaries, and the first news we get concerning them, is, that they are dead; and sometimes we are ready to despond at these frequently reiterated heavy tidings. But despondency here is nothing less than unbelief. Faith looks through this darkness, and sees the Saviour holding the stars in his right hand. His dismissing these labourers from their work on earth at so early a period, is no random act: he sees that it is better for them, and better for his cause, that they should be dismissed, than that they should remain. When those two young missionaries, the news of whose tragical death, a few years since, made our ears tingle, were engaging in their perilous enterprize; when

the last morning of their earthly existence had dawned upon them ; when the wretched cannibals were agitating the fearful question — if indeed they did agitate it — whether they should spare those unoffending individuals, or consign them to a horrible death — oh, if it could have been known in christian lands — if it could have been known to ourselves, at that moment, in what circumstances they were placed, how we should have lifted up our supplicatory voices — how the whole church would have fallen upon her knees, to entreat God to melt those savage hearts and spare those useful lives ! But the Saviour who held these stars in his hand, saw that they had better be removed to another hemisphere ; and therefore they *were* removed ; and though the church weeps at the thought that they set in blood, yet she rejoices in the reflection that they rose in glory.

Let no faithful minister then fear that he shall be called away before his work is accomplished. He may not indeed have done all which his benevolent mind has projected, and he may earnestly desire to live, that he may accomplish something more for his Re-

deemer's cause; yet, let him remember that if he is called away at the very *commencement* of his course, he has done the work which his Master designed for him here; and that, instead of spending an idle eternity, he is going to be exalted to an infinitely higher service in the eternal temple. I repeat, Brethren, if we are only faithful, we have nothing to fear as to the time of our departure. The Master whom we serve will protect us till the best time comes, and then will give us our release from the cares, and labours, and sufferings of earth, to enjoy the rest and the communion of Heaven.

But if the Saviour preserves and defends his ministers by his power, so also,

2. He *guides* them by his wisdom.

Do you inquire, *By what means* the Saviour guides his ministers?

I answer, by his *providence* — so ordering events as to clear away difficulties, and shed light upon the path of duty. I answer again, by his *word*; which is expressly given to be a lamp to our way; which not only contains general principles for the regulation of our conduct, but, in many instances, particular

cases analagous to those in which we are called to act; which, while it encourages and cherishes a spirit of docility, rewards the exercise of that spirit by satisfying scruples, and removing doubts. I answer, yet again, by his *Spirit*, exercising a silent and imperceptible influence over the mind; neutralizing the blinding power of passion and prejudice, clearing the mental vision by bringing the soul into intimate communion with him who is Light, and in whom there is no darkness at all. By these different agencies or instrumentalities, does the Saviour impart of his wisdom to his ministers, to enable them to understand the path in which He would have them to walk.

But then let it be remembered that this gracious agency on his part, supposes the discharge of a corresponding duty on theirs. If they are to be guided by his providence, they are to watch the indication of his providence, and in their interpretations of events, to surrender themselves up to the dictates of an unbiassed mind. If they are to be guided by his word, they must study his word with devout attention, making it the burden of

their meditations by day and by night. If they are to be guided by his Spirit, they must seek the influence of his Spirit with sincerity and importunity, and diligently heed all its gracious suggestions. There is no point of duty perhaps on which we are more in danger of deceiving ourselves than this: we may imagine that Providence speaks, that the Bible speaks, that even God's Holy Spirit speaks, in favour of a particular course, when, after all, the only voice that we hear is the voice of interest or passion coming up from our own bosom. Only let us be meek, and his guidance is pledged to us. "The meek He will guide in judgment, and the meek He will teach his way."

But on what *occasions*, or in what *circumstances*, does the Saviour guide his ministers?

He guides them in reference to their *field of labour*; intimating to them his will, whether they should devote their lives to preaching the gospel among the heathen, or should assist in sustaining the interests of the church, as it is already established, at home; whether they should occupy a comparatively obscure or a more prominent field of labour; whether they

should continue always in the same field, or remove from one field to another. These are all questions which sometimes press upon the mind of a minister, or a candidate for the ministry, with appalling weight; and they will never be properly answered, except in the case of him who takes counsel from above.

But the Saviour guides his ministers not only *to* their field of labour, but *in* it. And how much do they need direction at every step of their course! The work in which they are engaged is the most responsible in which mortals *can* engage. It is embarrassed with innumerable difficulties and discouragements, growing out of the depravity of the heart, the temptations of the world, and last, though not least, the feebleness of the instruments to which it is committed. And what minister shall think himself adequate to devise his own way, even for a single day? Happily, he has no occasion to attempt this; for the same gracious Master who requires his services, orders his footsteps. He who has made him a star, holds him in his hand, and directs all his movements. He clears away difficulties from the path of duty. He

causes light to shine out of deep darkness. He prevents a fall, where a fall would seem to have been ruin. Well might the prophet, in describing the Saviour's character, call him *Counsellor*.

3. He confers upon them peculiar *honour*. He honours them in their service, in their success, in their final reward.

Christ's ministers are honoured in the *service* to which he calls them. Is not the office of an *ambassador* an honourable office — especially if he have been appointed by some powerful sovereign, whose name is known, and whose influence is felt, every where ; and whose embassy relates to matters of the deepest moment, involving the interests, not of a single state only, but of the world? But every minister is an ambassador ; — an ambassador, not from any earthly court, but from the court of Heaven ; and his commission bears the signature of Zion's King ; before whom all the princes of the earth are as nothing, and who is able to dash his enemies to pieces as a potter's vessel. And the object of his embassy is the noblest, the grandest, to which the heart of man or angel ever beat.

It is not to negotiate a treaty of peace between two contending earthly kingdoms, but to carry the proclamation of pardon from the Sovereign of the universe to a revolted world; to beseech sinners to be reconciled to God, and thus to become entitled to the blessings of a free salvation. In short, it is to lend an influence in changing rebels into friends; in exalting worms into seraphs; in carrying into effect the sublime purposes of Christ's mediation; in bringing an immeasurable revenue of glory to God in the highest. If God is the most glorious of all beings, and salvation the most glorious of all his works, *whose feet are more beautiful upon the mountains, than the feet of those who publish these glad tidings?*

But let it be remembered that, while the service in which ministers are engaged, is in itself an honourable service, it is adapted to secure honour to them still further, by purifying and exalting their own characters. I know that this result is not *necessarily* experienced; for *Judas* once held this office, and instead of elevating his character, it only served to deepen his guilt and ripen him for perdition. But let the office be held by a man who loves

it for its own sake, and suitably estimates its responsibility, and seeks to avail himself of the assistance which it affords for his personal sanctification; and it cannot otherwise be, but that an influence will be exerted favourable to the consistency and elevation of his christian character. The prayers which he offers for others, will return in blessings upon his own soul. The truths which he proclaims to others, will come back upon himself with an invigorating and comforting influence. The plans which he forms for the benefit of others, even though they should never go into effect, will in their very formation, confer benefit upon *him*. The tears which he sheds for the sins and miseries of others, will exalt him into a nearer conformity, a closer communion, with his sympathizing Saviour. But piety is honourable both in the eyes of God and of man: that minister, then, surely, is honourable, who possesses the spirit and improves the privileges of his station.

Christ honours his ministers also in the *success* with which he crowns their labours. Wherever the gospel is preached in fidelity, there, sooner or later, the fruits of it are

manifest; and though the influence that gives it effect is dispensed in sovereignty, yet, as a general rule, no doubt the measure of fidelity indicates the measure of success. But then we must be careful not to judge too hastily in respect to the *amount* of success with which our labours are crowned; neither on the one hand encouraging ourselves too much from what we regard favourable appearances, nor yet on the other growing faint hearted, because the dews of divine grace are for a season apparently withheld. For though God has promised that the labours of his faithful ministers shall not be in vain, he has nowhere promised that they shall reap the harvest while they are yet sowing the seed. I can imagine that a man may, by his labours, have produced much visible effect of a certain kind upon his congregation, and may even have been hailed by all around him as a successful preacher, and that another may have sowed his seed, year after year, in tears, and mourned that the heavens over his head seemed like brass; and yet I can imagine that in the day when the actual results of the ministry of each shall be made known, the

apparently successful labourer may be found to have accomplished but little, while the weeping sower shall return with joy, bringing a multitude of sheaves with him. But is it not an honour to be permitted to witness in any degree the fruit of our labours? And even, if no fruit at present appears, is it not an honour to be engaged in a work in which the Son of God has pledged himself that we shall not labour in vain; in which the Spirit of God has pledged himself that he will be a co-worker with us?

And last of all, Christ honours his ministers in their *final reward*. Upon all his ransomed people indeed, he will bestow the crown of life; but is it not true that the office of a christian minister, where its privileges are rightly improved, and its duties faithfully discharged, is fitted to secure a crown of distinguished lustre? For not only has the minister who has thus magnified his office, made large attainments in piety, and thus become eminently meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, but he has been instrumental of saving souls — perhaps many souls from death; and each of these is to minister to his

glory and joy. Imagine a faithful minister at the end of his course, and in the act of receiving his crown. Mark him as he comes out from amidst the shadows of the dark valley, enraptured, entranced, by the first view he catches of Heaven. Who are they that are rushing into his arms with transport, bathing him with their tears of gratitude, welcoming him to their communion and their joys? Listen, and you shall hear their story from their own lips: "Once we were wretched wanderers from God; and one voice after another called upon us to return, but we heeded it not. *Your* voice, thanks be to God, spoke not in vain; for it was God's instrument to reach our consciences and hearts. *You* were our teacher in the school of Christ; *you* were our guide and helper in the christian life; we parted with you perhaps when we were in the valley of death: and here in Heaven, the remembrance of your fidelity has been associated with each song of praise that has trembled on our lips. Welcome, welcome to these joys to which you have been instrumental of introducing *us*; and our spirits shall glow with more intense ecstasy, because

earth has at last given up our best benefactor to Heaven. And is this all? Oh, no—listen again, and you shall hear another voice speaking in yet sweeter and more glorious accents—the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and of the Lamb—“Come thou blessed of my Father—come thou good and faithful servant—once an earthly vessel in which heavenly treasure was deposited—come and receive thy reward—rejoice in my perpetual benediction—live forever amidst these songs of praise, these thrones of glory, these manifestations of my power and wisdom and grace; take this diadem glittering with gems, and wear it as the badge, not merely of a ransomed soul, but of a faithful minister?”

My brethren, the scene is so glorious that it requires a strong faith to realize that it is not delusion; and yet our most vigorous conceptions, the very sublimest actings of our faith, do not approach the actual reality. Monarchs of the earth, bring all your crowns and lay them together, and see how their condensed brightness will appear, in comparison with that crown which awaits the ob-

scurest faithful minister of Jesus. You may scorn this comparison now ; but take heed lest it should be forced upon you, when your crowns shall be melting in the fires of the last day, and his shall not only survive that test, but gather from it a yet more radiant effulgence.

I have protracted this train of remark so far that I have not left myself time to make any extended application of it to the occasion on which we are assembled. Nor indeed is this necessary ; for the practical lessons which it suggests, are so obvious, that they will occur of course to every reflecting mind. But I cannot close the discourse without proffering to the venerable ecclesiastical body, by whose courtesy I stand here, my cordial congratulations that this important vacancy within their bounds has at length been so happily supplied. In the brother who, by these solemnities, is constituted one of your number, I cannot doubt that you will find an active coadjutor in the promotion of the peace, and purity, and general interests of the church. May you and he long be fellow helpers together unto the kingdom of God ! I rejoice in the privi-

lege of witnessing his happy introduction among you, and I may add, of meeting you in the spirit of fraternal sympathy and ministerial cöoperation. Beloved brethren, stars in the Saviour's right hand, may ye continue to shine with growing strength, for the benefit of the church on earth, till ye shall take your places successively in a nobler firmament, to constitute, by your ever increasing lustre, part of the overpowering radiance and glory of Heaven!

I may also be permitted, in a single word, to congratulate this congregation in view of the prospects which this occasion opens upon them. I congratulate you that, after a somewhat protracted season of vacancy, which is always a season of peril, you have opened your arms so cordially to welcome my beloved brother as your spiritual guide; and that amidst all the jealousies and alienations and conflicts, that constitute so large a portion of the history of many churches at the present day, *you* are a united and happy people. May the harmony which now prevails among you continue, and be bequeathed as a precious legacy to the next generation! May the

results of this hour be recognized in the preparation of many souls for Heaven, and celebrated in the grateful hallelujahs of the ransomed! But forget not, my friends, (and this single thought must stand in the place of more extended warning,) forget not that there *are* those — those no doubt in every congregation in which the gospel is preached, to whom the ministry proves a savour of death unto death.

Friends and brethren of this christian society, I am a witness for you to-day, that the hand of God has been upon you for good during a large portion of your existence as a community. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, soon after I had entered the ministry, I remember, in passing through this place, then a comparatively small village, to have conducted a religious service for you in some small place of worship, which I believe was designed to serve you only during your infancy as a congregation. Within the intervening period, the inconsiderable village has become a populous and opulent city, whose influence is felt to the extremities of the nation — I may say, to the ends of the earth. God grant

that, as your physical and intellectual resources are developed, you may have a corresponding growth in virtue and piety. As the forests that stood here half a century ago, bidding defiance to the wintry tempests, have bowed before the persevering energy of yourselves and your fathers, so may those moral wilds that still exist here as well as elsewhere, soon yield to the power of a well directed christian effort, and the whole region brighten into a garden, in which not one noxious plant shall be permitted to grow? As this city of your habitation shall extend itself on the right hand and on the left, may it become more and more a city of righteousness, and may the Lord be its light and glory! Happy, thrice happy, is that people whose God is Jehovah!

