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ALBANY.

THE ABOUNDING GRACE OF THE GOSPEL.

LUKE xiv. 22.—*And yet there is room.*

It will instantly occur to you that these words are connected with the parable of the great supper. A certain man who had made a feast, sent his servant, at the proper time, to invite the guests. But instead of accepting the invitation, they had both the incivility and the ingratitude to send back excuses which the master of the feast saw at once were occasioned by gross insincerity. He was angry at their conduct, and not without good reason; and straightway sent out his servant again, and directed him to bring in the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind. The servant having complied with his lord's command, returns to report his obedience, and at the same time makes the declaration: "And yet there is room."—The children of want and wretchedness to whom thou didst send me, I have collected agreeably to thine orders; but there are seats yet unoccupied, there are accommodations for a still greater number of guests.

The explanation of this parable is easy. The great supper represents that provision which is made in the gospel to supply the spiritual wants of men. The man who made the supper represents the Lord Jesus Christ. The invitation to the supper by the servant, represents the offer of salvation to the Jews by the Apostles. The rejection of the invitation denotes the rejection of the gospel offer, especially by the Pharisees, and higher classes of the Jews. The poor, the halt, and the blind, to whom the second invitation is addressed, may represent publicans, and others who were despised for the meanness of their occupation or character. All this, however, has a more general meaning, and may very properly be considered as illustrating the free grace of the gospel, and the treatment which the gospel receives in every age. "And yet there is room." It is an encoura-

ging declaration to every anxious and heavy laden sinner. It is with reference to persons of this description especially, that I purpose to consider it. May the Spirit of God open the heart of every such person before me, and cause the message now to be delivered to be as life from the dead.

“And yet there is room.” ROOM IN WHAT?

1st. Room in *the love of God*. There are two senses in which God may be said to love his creatures: he may exercise toward them feelings of benevolence, or he may regard them with a spirit of complacency. In the latter sense he loves only those who are conformed to his image: perfectly holy beings he regards with unmixed complacency: those who are partially sanctified only with a corresponding degree of complacency. But the love of benevolence, or a spirit of good will and compassion, he extends towards all his creatures; and in the exercise of this spirit, he will render all as happy, as is consistent with the grand designs of his government, and the best interests of the universe. It was in this divine perfection—this fountain of love in the very heart of Jehovah,—that the plan of our redemption took its origin; and here is the pledge, that every one of you who desire it enough to comply with the specified conditions, may be saved. What love was that, sinner, which contemplated your case as a wretched and ruined wanderer, and determined on the necessary provision to save you, millions of ages before you had a being! What love, that could resolve on such an expensive measure for your salvation, as the death of the Son of God; and which could induce the Almighty Father, in due time, to give up his Son to the actual sufferings and horrors of crucifixion! What love manifested towards you, in permitting you to be born where you have been; in bringing within your reach so many means for obtaining salvation; and in spreading before you so many motives to induce you to obtain it? If God has manifested so much love towards the whole race of men, and so much towards you in particular, be assured that his love is expansive enough to receive you on your return to him. Oh, how conclusive, and yet how unutterably tender is that argument of the Apostle—“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Yes, sinner, there is room enough for you in the love of God. That love is an ocean shoreless, bottomless. In every part of the universe, even in the prison of despair, there are those who feel, and who will sooner or later be compelled to testify, that God is Love.

2d. There is room in *the Saviour's bleeding heart*. Suppose you were lying in a state of wretched captivity in some distant land; and some benefactor hearing of your condition, should cross the ocean, and travel over mountains, and submit to the most painful sacrifices

with a view to your relief ; and suppose, after he should reach you, he should find that there was some fearful peculiarity in your condition, which rendered it impossible that any ransom should be accepted for you short of his own blood ; and suppose you should see him bow his head to the block, or else expire amid the more lingering agonies of crucifixion, and should know and feel that it was all done to deliver you from the wretched thralldom to which you were subject : could you find it in your heart to doubt whether that man regarded you with deep and strong affection ? and would you not conclude, and most reasonably too, that if he would give his life for you, there was nothing that he would not give ? Now, Jesus has given his life for you, sinner ; and to what other conclusion can you come in respect to *him* ? Every step that he took in this miserable world, involved him in some scene of suffering. Look at him in the manger, and behold his humble condition there. Look at him while he was driven about from city to city, not having where to lay his head. Look at him in the garden, and see under what a mighty burden he there labors, and agonizes, and well nigh sinks. Look at him at the judgment hall of Pilate. Look at him bearing his cross up to the fatal spot. Look at him nailed to the tree ; in the agony of death ; and listen to that groan with which all nature sympathised, and which announced that the death scene was over. And now, since he has done all this for you, and since he has risen from the dead, and has ascended into the heavens, for the purpose of carrying forward his mediatorial work, is it not ungrateful, and unreasonable, and criminal, to doubt that he is willing to receive you ? If there had not been room for you in his compassionate heart, can you suppose for a moment that he would ever have submitted to the agony of the garden, or to the ignominy of the cross ? Behold in what he has already done, a pledge that his arms are open for your reception ; and hear him saying to you in every dying groan—“ And yet there is room.”

3d. There is room in *the grace of the Holy Spirit*. I cannot tell how often, or in how many ways, the Spirit has already striven with you to bring you to repentance ; but I doubt not that you have all, at some time or other, felt his influences ; and perhaps some of you have mistaken his monitions, for some fanatical impulse, and have got rid of them as soon as possible ; and possibly there may be others, who, with a full conviction that the Spirit of God was operating upon them, have presumptuously said to him, “ Go thy way for this time.” But, however this may be, certain it is that the Holy Spirit is ready to strive with all who will welcome his gracious influences. When you think of the greatness of the work which devolves upon you ; of the blindness of your mind and the hardness of your heart ; when you think how great must be the change in old things passing away and all things becoming new, perhaps

you are ready to yield to discouragement, and to say this is too great a work for *you* to perform. What then? You are not expected to perform it without divine aid. God offers you his Spirit to second all your exertions; and that Spirit is an omnipotent agent; and he works in you most powerfully at the precise time when you work the most powerfully yourself. God permits you even to command his aid; and if you try it, be assured you will, like all others who have made the same experiment, find it effectual to your salvation. I repeat, there is room enough for you in the gracious aids of the Holy Spirit: this divine agent stands ready to convert, to sanctify, to fit you for heaven.

4th. There is room in *the offers and promises of the gospel*. All these offers and promises are founded in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Had no atonement been made, it is not easy to see how there could ever have been a proclamation of pardon in this ruined world. For aught that appears, age after age might have rolled away, and no tower of mercy or hope would ever have risen up to greet the bewildered eye, or to cheer the desolate heart. But in virtue of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, it has been proclaimed on this earth that there is forgiveness with God; and he has sent forth his ambassadors to apprise men that he is willing to have mercy upon them; and they are made welcome to all the blessings of his grace. Hear the gracious invitation. "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, let him come; yea let him come, and buy wine and milk without money and without price." And again, "Whosoever cometh unto me shall in no wise be cast off." And again, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the waters of life freely." What offers can you conceive more large, and free, and gracious, than these? Are they not infinite, like the God from whom they come; like the atoning sacrifice on which they are built?

5th. There is room *in the church*. Just in proportion as the people of God are alive to the obligations of religion, and to the honor of their Master, they desire to see the borders of Zion enlarged; and they have a heart to mourn over her desolations. When they look around, and see the multitudes who are thronging the road to death, their eye affecteth their heart; they mourn that so many youth, that so many men of activity and influence, that so many of every class, and of every age, are living for this world only, and are exclusively occupying themselves with the things which are seen and temporal. They long to see the number of the professed and real disciples of Christ, greatly increased; and they stand ready to welcome into the sacred enclosure of the church as many as will come with a right spirit, and their language is like that of Moses to Hobab, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath

spoken good concerning Israel." And when those around actually begin to turn to the Lord, and publicly to dedicate themselves to him in an everlasting covenant, it is a source of the richest joy to the church to welcome them to her communion. When the parent sees his child, in respect to whom he had well nigh given up the hope of his being converted, coming with apparent humility and faith to sit down with him at the sacramental table; when one, and another, and another, sees friends with whom he is connected in some of the tenderest of human relations, joining with him for the first time in the most impressive and delightful act of christian communion; when the humble disciple who had long been mourning over the languishing interests of Zion, sees in the increased number of communicants the evidence that those interests are reviving; there is in all this a joy that the world knoweth not of. Those who come to join them, find not only room, but a cordial welcome; and they are greeted as fellow helpers unto the kingdom of God.

6th. I observe, once more, that there is room *in heaven*. "In my Father's house," said Jesus to his disciples, "are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you." There are indeed many mansions, and some of them, no doubt, are distinguished by a higher degree of honor and felicity than others; but they are all mansions of glory: each of them is a part of that "building of God, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." There, there is to be heard the music of the redeemed: there is to be seen the unveiled glory of Jehovah: there are the streets of gold, and the river of life, and the throne of God and the Lamb: there is every thing in short to delight the eye, to ravish the ear, to regale the taste, to kindle everlasting ecstasy in the soul. But there, amidst all that beauty and glory, "there is room." There, amidst the best society in the universe, where the great King keeps his palace, and where the angels strike their golden harps—"there is room." There, where unmingled bliss will reign in its perfection through everlasting ages, where there will be no sin, nor sorrow, nor sighing, nor death, where friends will never know a separation, and where joy will beam in every eye, especially as it fastens upon the exalted Lamb of God—"there is room." All the inhabitants of heaven proclaim that there is room. Redeemed spirits proclaim it. Angels proclaim it. He who is the light and glory of the upper world proclaims it. There is a voice from above which seems to echo through the whole creation—a voice of love—a voice of tenderness—a voice of invitation, proclaiming, "yet there is room."

Our next inquiry is, "FOR WHOM there is room?"

I answer, in a word, for all who will come. Else what means the unlimited invitation; "Come unto me, *all ye* that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Ho, *every one* that thirst-

eth, come ye to the waters." "The Spirit and the Bride say, come; and let him that heareth say, come; and let him that is athirst, come; and *whosoever will*, let him come and take the waters of life freely."

Go, then, where you will, and if you find yourself among human beings, you need not fear to tell them of Jesus and his salvation, as something in which they are personally and most deeply interested. Stand on which ever side of the globe you will,—set yourself down in some distant region where not a beam from the Sun of righteousness has ever penetrated; and whether you find yourself by the side of the Indian of the wilderness, or of the worshipper of Jugernaut, or of the cruel disciple of Mohamed, or of the forlorn and outcast Jew, you may unhesitatingly offer to him the pardon which the gospel offers to all. To every human being who will accept the salvation of Christ, no matter in what country he may have been born, or to what habit he may have been educated, the Bible authorizes us to say, "there is room."

"But what," says the anxious sinner, whose sins are set in order before him, and who sees his own heart as he never saw it before,— "is there room for me?" Yes, room for *you*. You do not, indeed, mistake in the impression you have of your own guilt: true it is, you are as guilty, and no doubt far more so, than you have ever imagined; but there is room for you notwithstanding. Your case might indeed be desperate, and no doubt would be so, if God's mercy had any limits except those which his justice and his faithfulness mark out; or if Christ's atonement were not broad enough to cover the deepest and most dreadful pollution; but as it is, you have no cause to be discouraged. With the Bible before me, I feel perfect confidence in announcing to you that there is salvation for *you*; and that you may come freely and receive of the blessings of God's grace. Hear what God himself says: "Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

But says one, "there is something in my case that is peculiarly discouraging. I was born of pious parents, and was dedicated to God in my childhood, and have grown up under the influence of pious institutions, and have nevertheless contracted a habit of iron insensibility, and have either been indifferent to religion, or else have trifled with it all my life—is it possible that there can be room for me?" Yes, there is room for *you*. That insensibility of yours must indeed be removed: that heart must indeed break: but notwithstanding all your abuse of privileges, notwithstanding you have sinned against even your own baptism, and have become hardened by the very means which ought to have melted you, still upon your repentance you may be received. There is grace that can triumph over all your unworthiness. God himself waits for your return, and

would gladly welcome you as a prodigal come back from his wanderings. The angels and redeemed spirits would rejoice over your repentance. And if you have pious parents, or other dear friends, whether on earth or in heaven, no doubt they would hail you with gratitude and rapture as a joint heir with them to the heavenly inheritance.

But says another, "I have formed many resolutions to become religious, and have violated them all. Conscience has reprov'd me, and I have put it to sleep by thinking that there would be some more convenient season. Christian friends have besought me, and I have told them plainly enough by my conduct that I would not regard their kind admonitions. The Holy Spirit has striven with me, and I have even ventured to say to him, 'Depart at least for the present, till I can command more leisure, or till the world has lost some of its attractions, or till I have more resolution to enter on the great work'—and is it possible that there is room for me?" Yes, there is room for *you*. The course which you have adopted has indeed been marked by peculiar guilt; but still God will not cast you off for it, provided you will return now. Come with a broken and contrite heart, and his arms will be open to receive you. He will welcome you as a child, and adopt you just as freely into his family as if you had never been a wanderer; as if you had never grieved away his Spirit—never trifled with your own salvation.

But says another, "I have grown old in a course of impenitence. I have never perhaps yielded to gross sin; but then I have been proud, and self-righteous, and pharisaical: have thought little of the great sacrifice of Christ, and have practically turned away from it, and been trusting to a righteousness of my own. I am admonished now that my life is almost spent; and since it has been spent in such a manner, is it possible that there is yet room for me?" Ah, yes; even for *you*. Come and renounce that habit of self-righteousness; come realizing that you must perish unless you have some better plea than your own works as a ground of your acceptance; come with humility, with self-condemnation, with faith in the Saviour of sinners, and you will not knock at the door of mercy in vain. This habit of self-righteousness, if persevered in, will indeed destroy you; but if abandoned, you may be saved in spite of having indulged it. Come then with the spirit and prayer of the publican, and instead of pleading your own merit, of which you have none, plead only the mercy of God in Christ. It is enough for you to say, if you can say it from the heart—"God be merciful to me a sinner!" Though gray hairs are upon you, and mark you as a speedy victim for the grave; though you have all your life proudly turned away from the cross of Christ, and if you have sought salvation at all, have sought it where it is not to be found, still at the cross there is mercy for you: in the compassion of

God, in the Saviour's bleeding heart, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, there is room—room even for *you*.

I might go on to say that there is room for you in all the possible exigences of your condition. There is room for you to escape the lashes of a guilty conscience, the power of corrupt propensities, the forebodings of an awful hell. There is room for you in which you may be secure amidst the blasts of worldly calamity, for God will be your present hope in the time of trouble ; amidst the agonies of your last hour, for you will rest then on the everlasting arm ; after your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, for your body will be under the watchful care of your Redeemer, and your spirit will be rejoicing among the ransomed in heaven ; amidst the fires of the last day, the solemnities of the final judgment, for then especially your Saviour will vouchsafe to you his protection and his grace.

But instead of dwelling upon this train of reflection, let me in conclusion only refer you to the thought suggested by our Saviour in his saying ' *Yet* there is room.' What is here the precise import of the word *yet* ? It implies that notwithstanding the great multitude who have been saved, some in every age, and from every people as we have reason to suppose, there is as truly room for you as if you were to be the only inhabitants of the heavenly mansions. After so many ages have gone by, and so many millions have been gathered home to glory ; after the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations have expired, and almost two thousand years of the christian dispensation have elapsed, during each of which periods heaven has gained a multitude of inhabitants, you are still bid as welcome to the blessings of God's grace, as if those blessings were now for the first time offered to the world.

I say unto you then, ye young and old, ye men of all ages, and all conditions, and all characters, there is yet room for you. There is nothing in the purposes of God, nothing in the dealings of God, nothing in the word of God, that ought for a moment to discourage you from setting out on the way to heaven : on the contrary there is every thing to rouse you to a course of resolute exertion. But while I proclaim to you on the authority of God that there is room now, I should be treacherous to your souls, if I were not also to declare that the day will ere long come when the door of mercy, in respect to you, will be shut. There may, indeed, still be room for others, whose period of trial may be continued after yours has expired ; but *your* doom will be fixed in unalterable and everlasting wo. How near you may have approached to that period, none but the Omniscient God can tell ; but you have reason to tremble, lest you may even now be passing some of your last hours as a probationer for eternity. Come then and secure the salvation of your soul. If you decide that you will not accept the invitation of the Saviour, and if the voice of mercy should become dumb while you

are dreaming of a future season for repentance, and if you should wake up amidst the woes of despair, how much more poignant will be the agonies of eternal death for the reflection that the blessings of eternal life were urged upon you ; how much more intolerable to be confined in the dungeon of despair for the thought that there was room for you, if you would have consented to occupy it, in the palace of the King of glory ?

SERMON CCXLIX.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

DESTRUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF SELF-FLATTERY.

PROVERBS xiv. 12.—*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

ALL mankind desire to be saved ; but comparatively few are willing to be saved in the way which God has appointed. There is some how or other a repugnance in the human heart against the terms of salvation ; a repugnance which is never effectually overcome, but by the aid of the Spirit of God. In some, this opposition assumes a direct and palpable form ; in others, it winds itself up so dexterously in some fair garb, that it accomplishes an entire self-deception.

It is to the desire that men have to be saved on the one hand, and to the aversion they have to the humbling terms of the gospel on the other, that we are to attribute the fact that true religion has so many counterfeits ; that so many things are substituted for evangelical piety, which are either essentially opposed to it, or do not essentially belong to it. The invention of man has always been busy to find out some easier road to heaven than that which leads by the cross of Christ ; and various expedients have been tried ; and they have been a thousand times tested and shown to be vain, by affliction and death ; nevertheless men have not become tired of them, and they are willing still to stake their immortal interests upon them, though God himself has forewarned them that the end thereof will be destruction. This is the plain import of our text—"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."