

S E R M O N X.

CHRIST'S CONTINUAL CARE OF HIS CHURCH
AND PEOPLE.

ISAIAH, Chap. xxvii. Ver. 2, 3.

*In that day sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I
the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment:
lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*

ALL Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and an infallible writer informs us, that *whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.* Looking upon them in this view, and as revealed for this end and design, it leads us to behold with wonder, admire with pleasure, and with transporting gratitude think upon the exceeding great and precious promises made by that God who cannot lie, which are all yea and amen in Jesus Christ, the essential, consubstantial, and only begotten Son of God, who is the head and representative of the whole election of grace. With him the eternal Father entered into covenant on the behalf, and for the sake of his beloved ones. To him the

promise of eternal life was given before the world began; all the grants of grace for his people were made to him; and they have all been made good to him, and he is in the actual possession of all the grace contained in them. Hence the apostle saith, *All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen.* They are also revealed in the sacred word of truth, and are each and every one of them actually fulfilled by the effectual grace and power of the Lord the Spirit, to all who are alive to God, and who are living by the faith of the Son of God.

As I have taken what we call a promise for my text, it may not be amiss to give you a definition of what the promises are. The promises of God proceed from the eternal purposes of his grace towards his chosen people in Christ Jesus, revealed in the positive declarations of his mercy, inscribed in the written word, and hold forth to the view of faith, the grace God will bestow, the support he will afford, the blessings he will pour out upon his people, to supply their needs and necessities, *according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.* God is entitled the *God of all grace.* He hath made known his purposing grace by his promises, which become the foundation of our faith, the support of our hope, and the joy of our hearts. Grace in God's nature is the fountain; grace in his purposes is the spring; and grace in his dealings and dispensations is the stream; and God's word of promise is, like himself, truth and immutability: there can be no change in it; and the largeness of God's grace in the word of promise, which belongs to his

people, appears in this : that there is no case, want, circumstance, or state, into which they are, or may be brought, but is particularly noticed ; provision is made ; and a promise, either of support under trouble, or deliverance out of it, is to be found, if they search the Bible for it : and it is a part of spiritual wisdom to get acquainted with the promises of God, and with such especially, as most suit our case, experience, and necessity.

The words before us, which are to be the foundation of our present discourse, contain one of those great and precious promises, made by the Lord to his church and people, and is a full, large, and comprehensive one. It contains and represents the care of God over his vineyard, the church. The chapter begins with an account of a complete victory and conquest which the Lord would obtain for his people over their enemies ; and, as I apprehend it, in a figure, it shews the complete victory that God our Saviour would obtain over his and our spiritual enemies. *In that day (saith the prophet) the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan, the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.* These words, in their first and primary significancy, respect Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who is compared unto Leviathan, which some will have to be the whale, others the crocodile, who is said to be in the sea. Egypt being watered and made fruitful by the waters of the Nile, Pharaoh is said to have his dwelling in it. Among

and about the streams of the Nile, crocodiles haunt ; and the figure serves to distinguish the terribleness, cruelty, and power of the Egyptians and Assyrians against the people of the Jews. But the blustering rage of the one was laid low, and the pride of the other assuaged, by the blast of the Lord of hosts. As it respects the church of God ; sin, Satan, death, and hell, these fierce, strong, and proud foes, are conquered and eternally vanquished by the omnipotent Jesus. Our adorable captain of salvation with the two-edged sword of the word, overcame all the power of Satan. That *fore and great and strong sword*, was the weapon with which he fought the decisive battle, and came off an everlasting conqueror. By his dying for sinners, in their law-place, room, and stead, and bearing their sins in his own body on the tree, the damning guilt and reigning power of sin are subdued and destroyed ; death is disarmed of its sting, hell vanquished, and eternal redemption obtained for his whole church and people. In treating on my text, I will observe the following particulars :

First, that this song was sung on the occasion of the destruction of the church's enemies. Secondly, we have God's protecting care towards his church, expressed under the similitude of a vine-dresser, taking care to water and protect his vineyard. *I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment.* Thirdly, the constancy of his care ; *lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* These are the particulars ;

And we will begin with the first, and consider

this song, which was sung upon the occasion of the destruction of the church's enemies. *In that day, sing ye unto her a vineyard of red wine.* I would first observe that the church is compared to a vine and a vineyard, and which is frequently the case both in the Old and New Testament; as in the 80th Psalm, *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt; thou hast cast out the heathen and planted it;* alluding to the bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, and dispossessing the Canaanitish nations, to plant them in their room: and in verse the 15th, the church is called a vineyard; so also in the Song of Solomon, the church is compared to a vine and a vineyard. The church of Christ may be compared to a vineyard for the following reasons: a vineyard is a spot of ground separated and distinguished from others; so is the church of Christ from the rest of the world, by electing, redeeming, and efficacious grace. *Believers are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation,* and, being so, are *a peculiar people:* they are fenced about with sovereign grace, whereby they are made to differ from others. In the vineyard, the church, stands in the first place Christ, the true and most noble vine; and next to him true believers, who are there planted by him, ingrafted on him, and grow up in him. A vineyard is a very fruitful spot; so is the church of Christ, consisting of true believers, who are filled with the fruits of righteousness by Jesus Christ, who is the true vine on whom they are ingrafted, and from whom their fruit is found,

A vineyard requires great care and pains from the husbandman; so does the church: and Christ is continually employing his care over, and bestowing the showers of his grace upon it. Vineyards are delightful and pleasant, such is the church to Christ; he delights to walk in it, and often goes down into it, to observe how it grows and thrives. Vines must be watered, pruned, and propped. Christ does all this and much more to his vineyard the church; he waters it every moment by his grace, prunes, and lops off the unfruitful branches, supports the weak and tender vines with his almighty power, and fences them about with divine favours. Christ's vineyard, the church, is a place to sing as well as work in. He hath his ministers employed in working in it, by labouring in the word and doctrine, and in singing the Lord's song, in publishing the Lord's praise, and proclaiming his everlasting love, free grace, a finished salvation, the unfearchable riches of Christ, which fill the souls of the redeemed with joy unspeakable. *In that day, when the everlasting covenant hath been carried into execution by the incarnation of the Son of God; when everlasting righteousness is brought in, peace made, sin abolished, Satan conquered, and everlasting victory gained over all the principalities and powers of darkness, sing ye unto her a vineyard of red wine.* It is by the most precious blood of Christ, the church is cleansed and purged from sin, and redeemed out of the hands of law and justice; pardon of sin is the fruit of it. *We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace.* It is the

blood of Christ which alone can wash out the scarlet stain of sin, and obtain peace with God; and redemption through the immaculate Lamb of God, is the sweetest sound and song a believer can hear; it is music to the ear, honey in the mouth, and melody in the heart. Without the bloodshedding of Christ, sin would have undone our souls; and without God's own testimony in the Scriptures concerning the eternal worth and everlasting efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, the guilty conscience could have no peace. For when sin is known and felt in its guilt and power, the soul would sink into unutterable and everlasting despair, did not the Holy Spirit point the convinced person to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Nothing but the joyful sound of pardon and salvation, can raise up the soul, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, unto a living hope and faith in God. The Lord hath here prepared a song to be sung to the honour of his name by Zion's converts, in remembrance of his mercy, and for the refreshment of their spirits. *In that day sing ye unto her a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. Fury is not in me.* Here is the church's safety and happiness. The Lord delighteth in his people. He preserves and protects them. He supplies and waters them with showers of heavenly blessings; guards them by night and day, is at perfect peace with them, and all their enemies are under his feet; so that it must be a vain thing for any enemy to attempt to annoy them. *Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle?* (all the enemies of God's people are but thorns

and briars before the Lord, who will be unto them *a consuming fire.*) *I would go through* (or, march against) *them, I would burn them together.* Who would be so rash? Rather let every one of mine enemies humble himself, and fly to my grace. *Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.* We here see how the Lord is pleased to deal with such to whom he shews mercy. He pours out of his Spirit upon them, and puts his Spirit within them, who gives them to feel their want of Christ, and makes them willing to come unto him. Hereupon the soul is brought to know that God is reconciled, is the God of peace, and that he is at perfect peace with all his people in Christ Jesus. He hath declared it, *Fury is not in me.* If the soul asks, how shall I be assured of it? How shall I know my interest in it? The Lord gives this command, *Let him take hold of my strength;* Jesus is the all glorious Mediator; take hold of him, as set forth by the Father's love and grace, as a propitiation for sin; he is the great peace-maker. But how shall we take hold of Christ? By faith. The Father draws the heart to Christ, by the invincible power of his omnipotent grace. The soul drawn, lays hold of Christ, as the strong and almighty Saviour: and Christ being trusted in, and relied upon, by the faith of the operation of God, hereby the soul, by the testimony of the Spirit, is brought to know its personal interest in Christ, and that God is at perfect peace with him. The Holy Ghost reveals God as reconciled in Christ and at perfect peace: and when believers are under fear and trouble through guilty

fears and unbelief, he directs them to take fresh hold of Christ by faith, whereby they have a renewed sense of God's love towards them, and of their interest in the covenant of peace. Every sermon concerning the love of God in Christ, is a song to every trembling, doubting, disconsolate believer. The Lord does not come to his people calling them to mount Sinai, discovering himself in terror and horror; but he comes to them in the still small voice of peace and pardon; and from mount Zion he sings forth the glorious song of redemption to poor undone sinners and doubting faints. It is well for us that it is so; for when a soul is really and effectually awakened by the Holy Spirit, to see, feel, experience, and know, what a state of sin and guilt Adam's fall had brought it into, no voice but the Lord's can raise up the guilty sinner to wait and hope for the salvation of God. As God wounds in conviction, so he only can heal. It requires the almighty power of God to be put forth, in order to comfort the truly awakened person. Let the whole college of divines, yea, summon all the holy angels from heaven, and let them all cry, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God*: it will all be in vain, until the God of all comfort, himself, by his own word and spirit, is pleased to speak peace and comfort to the heart. Luther used to say, "It requires as much to satisfy a guilty conscience as to satisfy God himself." Nothing can give the guilty conscience peace, but the blood of Christ; and this yields peace only in its application, which it is the peculiar prerogative and office of the eternal Spirit to make. He applies it by

the word of promise, bearing his own testimony in the heart, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. He draws the soul to believe this as an everlasting truth; and in our believing it, the Lord speaks peace to the heart, and by this means the believer is raised up from under the burden of his sin and guilt. Hereupon the Lord sings this sweet song of his redeeming, pardoning grace. A bleeding Saviour is a reviving sight to a broken-hearted sinner. A purple Saviour cleanseth a scarlet crimson sinner; a Saviour full of boundless grace, bottomless mercy, everlasting love; this is just such an one as the soul wants. When this well of salvation is revealed and discovered, the joy of the Lord becomes our strength. It is then a day of triumph, conquest, and joy. The soul is everlastingly conquered by the love of Christ. The will is, with a kind of omnipotent sweetness, drawn to the Saviour. It is the day of the espousals of the soul to Jesus; and it is the day of gladness of heart to the victorious Redeemer. A song is sung in the church of Christ upon this occasion; yea, God rejoiceth in this joy, *In that day sing ye unto her a vineyard of red wine.* The church is compared to a vineyard of red wine, because she is redeemed from sin, Satan, death, and hell, by the blood of Christ: also, because of those bloody persecutions which from time to time it has been exposed unto: principally, because of the precious fruits it brings forth to the praise and glory of God; all of which are the effects of her feeding upon the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer. In the church of Christ is found the wine which cheereth the

heart of God and man. God's love, which is the ocean from whence all spiritual blessings flow, and which like wine, refreshes, comforts, strengthens, exhilarates, and emboldens his people, fills their hearts with joy, their mouths with praise, their souls with delight in him as their everlasting portion and inheritance; likewise pardon, peace, cleansing, and healing through the stripes and blood of Christ, make the church like a vineyard of red wine, their thoughts being at times wholly intent upon their Saviour's sufferings: so that looking upon their Jesus as crucified, who is their head, and *is like Carmel; and the hair of their head* (the thoughts of their hearts upon his bloody sweat in the garden, his strong crying and tears upon the cross) *like purple*, being deeply steeped in meditation upon their beloved and in his bloody sufferings; thus in the sight of God they are as a vineyard of red wine—red in the blood of their Lord's atoning sacrifice, in which they are everlastingly pure, and by which they draw nigh unto God; yea, they rejoice in him through our Lord Jesus Christ, having received his atonement, and rested their souls upon it. Also the sacrifice of Christ, remembered by them in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, may be said to refresh the heart of God and man, as it is by the offering of his soul and body in union with his Deity, that justice is satisfied and wrath appeased; and by the remembrance of it, the hearts of God's people are comforted and refreshed. From hence we observe, there is matter for real joy; Christ's vineyard, the church, is ever before him, and it is ever his delight:

he dwelleth in his people for ever. God rejoiceth over his people to do them good : and they rejoice in him with exceeding great joy, the cause of which is, that the Lord is their portion and inheritance, and is become their salvation, their shield, and exceeding great reward.

This brings me secondly, to take notice of God's protecting care towards his church, which is expressed under the similitude of a vine-dresser, taking care to water and protect his vineyard. *I the Lord do keep it ; I will water it every moment.* As a church is compared to a vine and a vineyard, so the Lord is represented as the husbandman, or vine-dresser ; and his care is manifested by his preserving and watering his people with the dews and showers of heavenly grace and divine influences. What are the people of God, in themselves considered ? Nothing but flesh and deformity ; though, as considered in Christ, they are beautiful and glorious ; in themselves, they are sinful ; yea, in themselves, they are emptiness, vanity, and misery : so that they require the Lord's constant care. They would be continually falling into sin and misery, if not protected and preserved by the Lord himself ; who, out of the riches of his own grace, becomes their keeper, and will be their guide even unto death. We shall endeavour to consider, as the Lord may be graciously pleased to direct and assist, under this second particular head of our present discourse, first, how the Lord is the keeper of his people ; and, secondly, how he waters their souls every moment.

First, the church of Christ, which for its value, excellency, and preciousness in his sight, is styled a vineyard of red wine, is the peculiar property, care, and charge of the Lord of hosts; he is the keeper of it; he preserves and defends it from evil. What is here said, and which seems to be spoken, and may be understood of the church of God collectively considered, is also true as it respects every individual member of our Lord's real and mystical body. They are all and every one of them the objects of everlasting love, vessels of mercy, the purchase of Christ's most precious blood: in his sight they are perfectly comely through his comeliness put upon them; a garden of delight which the Lord hath blessed; *an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits; a vineyard of red wine.* The eye of the Lord is ever upon them, towards them, and around them for good. Agreeably to what Elihu says to Job: *He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous; but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted:* which gives us a beautiful account of God's grace and providence exercised by him on his people. His eyes of providence are upon them to supply their temporal wants, and to protect and defend them from their enemies, and they are never off them: so the eyes of his love, grace, and mercy. JEHOVAH, the Father, always viewed them in his Son, and ever beheld them righteous in him, through his righteousness imputed unto them; and looked upon them with delight and pleasure: and always so views them. They are set as a seal upon the heart of Christ, engraven on

his hands, and are ever before him, and in his view. His eyes are upon them from the beginning of the year to the end of it; yea, from one eternity to another; were set upon them from everlasting: and are upon them in time; at the time of conversion, to quicken and call them by grace; and afterwards they continue upon them under all their afflictions, temptations, and desertions, and will ever remain on them, and never be withdrawn. Nothing can separate believers from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. They are equal to kings on thrones; they are so accounted of by the Lord, being made by him kings and priests; *yea, he doth establish them for ever*, as righteous persons in Christ's righteousness, which is an everlasting one; and they shall never come into condemnation; for they are established in the love of God, in the covenant of grace, in the hands of Christ, in a state of grace now, and they shall be confirmed in a state of happiness to all eternity. And they are exalted, being raised as beggars from the dunghill, to sit among princes, even among the princes of God's people; and they will one day be exalted and placed at Christ's right hand, they will sit down with him for ever in his throne, and reign with him for ever and ever. The Lord himself is their keeper, and they are well kept by him: it implies that he is with them—in the midst of them; that he surrounds them, protects and provides for them. So run the gracious declarations of God's grace and protecting care towards his beloved people in the charter of grace: *I the Lord will*

keep thee. And speaking of his church as a city : *I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.* This is the believer's security, his comfort, and the foundation of his hope for perseverance in the good ways of God—the Lord's absolute promise; who hath spoken in the word, and still speaks thus : *Fear thou not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.* The church and people of God are continually surrounded with enemies, temptations, and snares. The corruption of fallen nature, the exceeding deceitfulness of sin, the malice of Satan, together with the allurements of the world, would be too strong for the child of God, were he left to grapple with these enemies in his own strength. The believer would soon find sin which dwelleth in him, more than a match for all his inherent grace ; and Satan would easily swallow him up, if the Lord was not his keeper. The grace of God implanted in the soul in regeneration by the Holy Spirit, does not destroy the indwelling corruption of our sinful nature ; neither do the communications of divine grace deliver us from temptations and trials. The more the soul is under the influence of grace, the more he feels the sinfulness and opposition of his carnal heart rebelling against the holy will and law of God. The more communion the believer hath with God, the more Satan rageth, and the more his malice will be increased. It is truly marvellous, wonderful, and surprising, how the Lord

preserves and maintains spiritual life in the souls of his people, notwithstanding all the conflicts, temptations, and oppositions which they experience both from within and without themselves. You would look on it as a miracle in nature, if you saw in one channel, two directly contrary streams, running with a constant course and force in direct opposition to each other. The regenerate man experiences a like miracle in himself: he feels to his grief that there are two distinct, opposite principles in him, and that *the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and that these are contrary one to the other.* Sin and grace are both in the regenerate soul; and are both distinct and opposite in their operations: like water and oil which, though in the same vessel, will never coalesce or mix with each other. This is the occasion of those soul troubles and inward conflicts which God's truly regenerate people experience. It is this which fetches those sighs and groans from their inmost souls, as it did from Paul, who cried out, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Blessed be God, there is deliverance for us in Christ. And believers do at times triumph in the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Jesus, over sin, self, Satan, and every enemy, saying, *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died: yea, rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.* And though believers do not always by faith perceive it, yet blessed be the Lord, he is their keeper. It may be you are ready to ask, how does the Lord

keep his people? Are they always safe? Does no kind of evil befall them? Are they always brought off, in the strength of the Lord, more than conquerors? I will endeavour, by answering these queries, to point out to you the Lord's goodness expressed towards his people in his keeping of them. *I, the Lord, do keep them.* The Lord is their keeper, and he glories in it; he keeps them by his mighty power, as in a garrison, through faith, in a dependence upon himself. He is their house of defence, and their shield; all his power is put forth to protect his people from the power of hell, the gates of which shall never be able finally to prevail against them. The Lord is with his people; the name of the church is, *The Lord is there*; and his presence is a life-giving, a soul-quickenings, an heart-warming, faith-strengthening, and hope-encouraging presence. He keeps the souls and bodies of his people, their whole persons, and hath undertaken to preserve them to the end, that they may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And *God is faithful*, saith Paul, to perform all this. The Lord, in the course of his dealings with them, does by the blessed teaching of his Holy Spirit, as also from their own experiences, lead them to know and feel the need of his divine guardianship and constant care. They find the Lord hath kept and will keep them even unto the end. This appears unto them from the word of promise, which cannot be broken: and from their experience, which hath been the fruit of God's faithfulness to his word and work. For they find that he doth not forsake the work of his

hands, and that his grace is in them as *a well of water, springing up into everlasting life*. Though it may be, they have their falls; yet though they fall, they are not utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand. The safety of God's people is thus expressed: *The eternal God is thy refuge: and underneath are the everlasting arms; out of which they cannot fall*. If they fall ever so low, yet JEHOVAH's everlasting arms of love and mercy, truth and power, are underneath them, to support, bear up, strengthen, and preserve them. And the Lord's people are safe, eternally so. He is said to be *a wall of fire round about*, yea, to be *in the midst of*, and *a present help to them in trouble*. This caused the Psalmist to exult, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*. Some suppose this, the 46th Psalm, was penned on account of the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib being raised in the time of Hezekiah; it certainly is applicable to any time of confusion and distress: and it is reported concerning Luther, that, when he saw a storm arising against the church, he would say, come let us sing the 46th Psalm, and then let the enemy do his worst. In it a strong confidence in the Lord is expressed. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: though the waters thereof roar and be troubled; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early: as, indeed, he did in Hezekiah's time, when*

Jerusalem was surrounded with an exceeding great army, and yet in one night *the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand: and when the inhabitants of Zion arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.* A blessed proof this, that the Lord's presence, his being in the midst of his people, is for their protection, safety, and good. It may be, you will be ready to ask, are they always safe? To which the answer is, that the Lord, when he brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, *went before them by day* in a pillar of cloud; and by night in a pillar of fire, to lead, cover, and defend them: so also he is spiritually present with his people at all times, in all places, in all cases, by his spiritual covenant promise, which is their security, preservation, and glory. He being always with his people, they are always safe and secure. It may be you will further ask me, in what sense are they so? I reply, they are safe, under JEHOVAH's protection; and secure, as he keeps them: and in the 121st Psalm, which was written purposely to celebrate the Lord's goodness to his people, manifested in his being their keeper, it is expressly said, *The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil.* How are we to understand this? The Lord's people are not in every sense kept from evil. In the Psalm quoted, it is three times repeated to awaken our attention and quicken our observation to this blessed truth, that the Lord is the keeper of his spiritual Israel. Poor believer! thou hast a keeper who takes care of thee, and that keeper is the Lord.

He is so watchful and careful of his charge, that his mercy and goodness follow his people all their life long. He is ever mindful of his covenant, and of his people; and will perfect that which concerns them: and if at any time his people run into evils, and go astray, during all such time, his eye and care are towards them; yea, and over them then most; to weaken the temptation, to restrain corruption, and, even when actually fallen, to restore and recover his people, and bring them back again to him, who is the great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. His care is principally exercised about preserving his people, that sin may not have dominion over them. So that we are to understand such promises of God's keeping us from all evil, and preserving us blameless, to have respect to keeping us from the evil of sin, so as not to suffer us to be tempted above what he enables us to bear; or of his keeping us from being finally conquered, and eternally overcome with it. He takes special care of our goings in his way, and will therefore, when we wander from him, be sure to reduce us again by repentance, and bring us back. *He will keep the feet of his saints.* He keeps his people from the evil of sin, as it respects the love, guilt, and power of it. And he preserves his people from all evil, not by preserving them so as they do not experience what evil is, but by so working for them, in and by it, that all things work together for their good; and though they are not always victorious, but are sometimes foiled by sin and Satan, yet they have a complete victory in Christ their head: and when they resist sin,

self, and Satan, in his name and strength, they also conquer; yea, the feelings and conflicts they have of and with sin, make them to hate it the more perfectly, and groan for perfect deliverance from it. For though the child of God is not freed from the inbeing of sin, yet he hates it, and loathes himself on the account of it. Every real evil that he is preserved from, is owing to the Lord alone.

I pass on to the second thing pointed out under this head, which is the Lord's concern to water the souls of his people. *I, the Lord, do keep it; I will water it every moment.* The care of God towards his vineyard, the church, appears most divinely in his keeping it, and watering it. And the clouds wherewith he refreshes his people are the ministers of the everlasting gospel; who as clouds are in the visible heavens, so are they in the visible churches of Christ: as the clouds are for watering the earth, that it may bring forth fruit, so the ministers of the gospel, as filled with the gifts and graces, with the word and doctrine of Christ Jesus, refresh the Lord's people with showers of divine blessing. The Spirit of Christ accompanying his word and ordinances, the souls of his people are quickened and strengthened. *I will be (saith the Lord) as the dew unto Israel.* In a sovereign, gradual, free, and wonderful manner, the Lord quickens, refreshes, exhilarates, and comforts his people. As the glorious perfections of God's nature shall fail before the church of Christ be forsaken and left to the power and rage of her enemies, so she is also assured of constant supplies and nourishment from the Lord himself, and that with-

out fail, even for the least moment. *I, the Lord, do keep it, and will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* He will water her with his heavenly doctrine to preserve her verdure, and increase her spiritual growth, and promiseth to be her guardian night and day; in the darkness of adversity, and in the day of prosperity: so that Satan shall not outwit, nor the craft and subtilty of heretics and deceivers waste and insnare her, *I will water it every moment.* Christ is a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. He it is who waters, refreshes, and makes glad the city of our God, his chosen and beloved ones. As rain refreshes the earth, waters the hills, and descends to the refreshment of both man and beast, so Christ's gracious presence, the sacred influences, the blessed showers of heavenly communications from him to his people, cause their souls to revive, their hearts to rejoice, and their graces to be excited and drawn forth towards him whom their souls love. The river of God's love ran, as it were, under ground from eternity, and broke forth in the heart of Christ when he hung upon the cross; and when it once breaks forth towards, and upon any of us in conversion, it never ceases to be flowing forth in the communication of some blessing or other to the believing soul. Our Christ is the fountain of living waters: he is full of grace, and he is continually watering his church and people, and bestowing upon them real good. *I will water it.* That Christ waters his church none will deny; that it is an infinite blessing, his people will confess and acknowledge; that

it is all of grace, no faint will object unto: but that this should be every moment, here, ten thousand to one, but unbelief will start and raise objections. I will therefore personate the believer, and suppose him arguing against the truth of the promise as it respects his own experience of it, thus: Surely, though I believe the word of God is immutably true, and that God cannot deny himself, yet, sure I am, that this is not true concerning me: I am not watered by the Lord every moment; I have not his refreshing and comforting presence. Give me leave here to ask, Is God no further gracious to thy soul, O believer! than thou canst see, feel, and discover? Depend upon it, whoever thou art, who dost believe on Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost, thou hast experienced, art interested in, and dost partake of more grace than thou dost conceive.

This promise of the Lord, *I will water it every moment*, respects all and each of the children of the Most High; and it is continually fulfilled. Consider, believer; who continues spiritual life in thee? Who quickens thee in prayer, and draws out thy soul in desires after God? Is it not the Holy Spirit? What is this but the real fulfilment of this promise? Thou wilt have no objection against this; but how this should be the case every moment, is the greatest wonder. And yet, believer, if Christ did not water thy soul every moment, though it is altogether imperceptible by thee, thou wouldst die: for inherent grace could not support itself. This plant would wither and fail without the constant care of Christ, and

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did he not renew thy soul, and water thee afresh every moment. To this, it may be, thou wilt yet object: surely it is not so, it cannot be; for the truth is, I have been in sinful frames, I have even fallen under sinful influences; how can I think God has been watering my soul every moment, when thus it has been with me? To this I answer, that believers would be in a miserable state, if in the worst of frames, if at any time, even when they sin, and have sinned most, they were not secretly renewed by the Holy Spirit; for then this would follow upon it, that we should fall back instantly into unregeneracy; but in the worst days we do not. He upholds by renewing something of his grace and gracious conflicts in us against sin: and though we feel not these renewings, yet we are thus daily, yea momentarily, renewed: which caused that holy man, Mr. Dodd, once to say in the hearing of that man of renown Dr. Thomas Goodwin, "I believe that I am thus renewed every day, though I discern it not." So it is also, as it respects the Lord's watering the souls of his people every moment. This is certainly the case, though they do not every moment perceive it. Blessed be God for it, his going forth in the church is prepared as the morning. His appearance for her and in her, is as certain as the morning light at the appointed hour. All the clouds which threaten a perpetual night cannot hinder it; all the workers of darkness cannot prevent it: the morning will dawn, whether they will or not: Christ will not fail his people, nor forsake them for one single moment:

Which leads me, thirdly, to observe the constancy of his care, *Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* The Lord is the keeper of all his spiritual Israel: his power upholds, his arm defends, and from the ocean of his grace he waters them every moment. *Lest any hurt them, he will keep them night and day.* By which we may understand not only the night and day of temporal adversity and prosperity, in both of which we need the Lord's care; but by it also we are chiefly to understand foul trials and troubles. There are times when God's beloved ones have a long dark night of temptation, desertion, and persecution: at which time the Lord keeps them, and is really with them in a way of grace though they perceive it not. Temptations are for the exercise of faith; and the Lord saith, *I will be with thee in the hour of temptation.* Desertion is a mournful season; but it often prepares the soul for enlarged communion with the Lord. Persecution is a cross to the outward man, but God will keep his people, and cause them to glorify him in it, and under it. *He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper, in the night of darkness and spiritual distress, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.* As the cloud of glory, in which Jehovah was, covered the Israelites in the wilderness, and screened them from the scorching rays of the sun, so doth the Lord, by his spiritual presence, save his people from being smitten, so as to be spiritually wounded with the sun of persecution. *The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord*

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shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul: the Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and even for evermore. He also keeps thee in the day of spiritual prosperity. Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. May the Lord help us to mix faith with the promise. Amen.