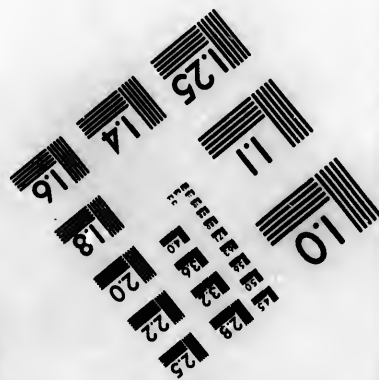
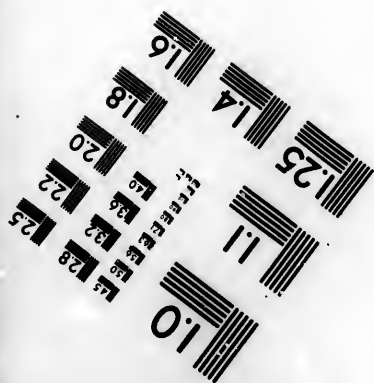
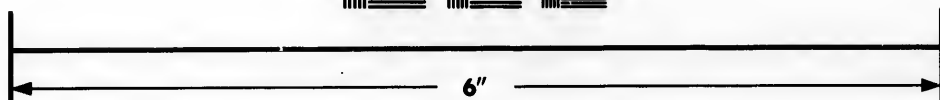
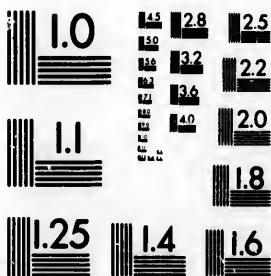


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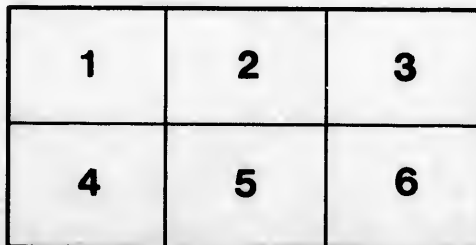
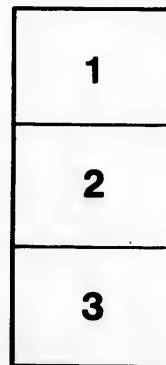
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M. Thomson 12.
A ^{to} *M. Lawrence*

SERMON,

PREACHED AT
TRINITY CHURCH,

SAINT JOHN, N. B.

On **SUNDAY, 24th November, 1839.**

BY

The Rev. I. W. D. GRAY, A. M.

UPON RESUMING HIS DUTIES IN THE PARISH, AFTER AN ABSENCE
OF TWELVE MONTHS IN ENGLAND.

“ We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your
servants, for Jesus' sake.”—2 COR. iv. 5.

SAINT JOHN, N. B.

PRINTED AT THE BRUNSWICK PRESS, PRINCE WILLIAM STREET ;
BY **WILLIAM L. AVERY.**

1839.

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SERMON.

“Brethren! I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you.”

1 Cor. xv. 1.

WHITHERSOEVER we turn our eyes upon the objects that surround us here, we see the marks of change most visibly inscribed upon them. Our habitations, brethren, are but uncertain abodes; the best of them, is only a tabernacle in the wilderness, and we, the occupants of them, are, as it regards our mortal bodies, more frail and perishable than they are. The absence of only a few short months from the scene we have dwelt in, affords us ample scope for serious reflection upon the vicissitudes of the present life, and tells us, in terms too plain to be mistaken, that “this is not our rest.” It is consolatory, however, to remember, that though “the fashion of this world passeth away,” we have even here one thing that is unchangeable, one possession that never varies, one gift from the Father of mercies, which from childhood to hoary hairs, from the cradle to the grave, remains to bless and cheer us on our way, viz. *the Word of the Living God*. As Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, so is the Gospel of Christ; and, in this respect it differs from every thing else in the world—“all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever; and this is the

word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.”* St. Paul refers to this point in the text before us. Having preached among the Corinthians some years before, he now in writing to them, adverts to this circumstance, with a view to remind them of the unchangeable character of that religion which he had taught them, and to warn them against the slightest departure from its saving principles—“Moreover Brethren! I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.”

I am not forgetful, brethren, of the vast difference in point of qualifications and devotedness, between the Apostle of the Gentiles and the ordinary minister of Christ; and much less could that distinction be overlooked, by me, while from a text descriptive of the Apostles conduct, I advert, however remotely, to the exercise of my own ministry among you; yet are there some leading particulars in which all who are the Ambassadors of Christ, must proceed in the same course, act upon the same principles, aim at the same results; and assuredly, among these particulars, we must class the delivery of the Gospel message, the preaching Christ crucified, the announcement of those glad tidings of great and universal joy, which saints on earth and angels in Heaven, delight to hear and to repeat.

My purpose at present is to enlarge upon the sentiment suggested by the text, by shewing in a few particulars, what that Gospel is which the Minister of Christ declares, and the necessity of adhering to it, in all our ministrations. My wish

* 1 Peter i. 24-25.

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and my prayer is, brethren, that God may guide me, in my remarks, and dispose your hearts, to receive as His message, whatever is spoken in accordance with His will.

I. First then we inquire *what that Gospel is which the Minister of Christ declares*. "Brethren!" says the Apostle, "we declare unto you *that Gospel which we preached unto you.*" What was the sum and substance of the Gospel which he had preached and to which he declares his intention of adhering in the whole exercise of his ministry?

To preach the Gospel and to preach Christ, are, in the Apostle's language, terms of the same significance. Hence, in another chapter of this epistle, we find him declaring to the Corinthians, in reference to his past ministry among them, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with the excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God: for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified."* Elsewhere he says, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord;"† and again, in a different passage, "we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them that are saved, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."‡ We shall greatly mistake the import of these texts, however, if we imagine them to signify that the "testimony of God," which forms the grand subject of the ministry of reconciliation, is to be limited to a single topic, even though that topic were of the most astonishing character in itself, or vital interest to the soul. Bright as the sun is, while he pursues his pathway through an unclouded sky, one half his glory would be

* 1 Cor. ii. 1-2.

† 2 Cor. iv. 5.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 23-24.

lost, if contemplated alone ; it is when viewed in his relation to other bodies, when regarded as the centre of a vast system, as the source of life, and light, and joy, to the worlds which revolve around him, that we recognise in his created excellence, the image of his Maker's glory. So is it, brethren, with the cross of Christ ; it must be viewed, not singly and alone, but in relation to other truths, as the grand centre round which the whole christian system revolves, before we can share in the feelings which inspired the Apostle's declaration ; "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world." It is evident, from the statements of God's word, that such was the light in which St. Paul viewed the subject, and that in preaching the cross of Christ, or in other words the Gospel, he preached it fully and clearly, in all *its truth and certainty*, in all its *glorious discoveries*, in all its *high demands*, and in all its *transcendent privileges*.

He preached it, brethren, in all *its truth and certainty*. In declaring God's counsel to man, St. Paul and his brother Apostles have dealt with us, as rational beings, not requiring us to yield our assent to their statements, blindly and ignorantly, without any reasonable ground for doing so ; but affording us the most ample proofs of their credibility ; placing before us the plainest evidences of their divine authority, and demanding from us, the acquiescence both of heart and mind, not because they asserted them, but because God had revealed them, and abundantly proved their truth. In preaching to the Jews, their grand aim was to establish the fundamental point, that "*Jesus was the Christ*"* or Messiah, because they were

* Acts ix. 22 ; xvii. 3.

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already prepared to expect a Messiah, and to bow implicitly to his authority when he came. In preaching to the Gentiles, it was requisite to do more than this. The way was to be prepared, by "reasoning with them of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come;"* it was necessary to persuade them, that "God had commanded all men every where to repent,"† and to produce this persuasion, by an appeal to powers which evidently exceeded the compass of human energy. And these things the Apostles did. They appealed to prophecy to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, for the conviction of the Jews; and they appealed more especially to miraculous powers with which they were invested to produce the same conviction in the minds of Gentile hearers.‡ In a word, they preached the Gospel, in all its truth and certainty, proving evidently that it was God's revelation; and demanding submission to it, upon this ground. Men, under their instruction, were taught to regard the Gospel Message, "not as the word of man, but, as it was in truth, the word of the living God."

But Paul and his fellow-labourers in the ministry, also preached the Gospel, *in all its glorious discoveries*. What is the Gospel, brethren! as to its distinctive character? It is *glad tidings of salvation through a Saviour*.|| Salvation is its theme, full, free, everlasting salvation; the immortality of the soul, the resurrection and glorification of the body, the liberation of both from the chains of sin and sorrow, their renewal in the image of a holy God, and admission into His glorious presence above. This is the Gospel theme; and hence its Divine Author in unfolding this subject, is said to

* Acts xxiv. 25. † Acts xvii. 30. ‡ Acts xxviii. 1, 10. || Luke ii. 10-11.

have "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,"* and the Prophet, piercing through the veil of futurity, and catching a distant view of his ministry, exclaims, "How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation."† Observe, however, that the Gospel is not simply the tidings of salvation, but of salvation *through a Saviour* ; Redemption through a Redeemer ; restoration to peace with God, to holiness and happiness, through a Mediator. This is the grand peculiarity of the Gospel. This is the great mystery, which prophecies intimated, types foreshadowed, Apostles preached, and angels desired to look unto, viz. that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;‡ that there is no other name under Heaven whereby we can be saved;|| that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no man cometh unto the Father, but by Him."¶ It was evidently, brethren, the chief design of Apostolic preaching, and it is still the leading design of every faithful Minister of the Gospel, to preach Christ crucified, to exhibit the cross of Jesus as the only basis of the sinner's hope to hold forth the incarnate suffering, glorified son of God, as the alone medium, through which we can obtain remission of sin, communion with God, spiritual assistance and eternal blessedness. Hence we hear from the Apostle the wise decision : "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified;"§ and again, the noble declaration, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world."**

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

† Isai. lii. 7.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 19.

|| Acts iv. 12.

¶ John xiv. 6.

§ 1 Cor. ii. 1-2.

** Gal. vi. 14.

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Nevertheless, brethren, it would be no Gospel to you or to me, unless the proclamation of its mercy came attended *with its high demands*. "The foundation of God; the corner stone which He has laid in Zion, standeth sure;" it is fixed, immutable and eternal; it is "a sure foundation;" the whole superstructure of God's temple can rest upon it, in perfect safety; time cannot weaken it, eternity cannot survive it, the powers of darkness cannot shake it; yet does the same voice which announces "the foundation of God standeth sure," most emphatically add, "and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."* The Grace of God, brethren, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men;" why? for what purpose? with what design? "teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."† Can we then come to you, brethren, with the Gospel's peace, and not with the Gospel's demands? Can we proclaim liberty to the captive, and omit to tell you of the law of liberty? Can we repeat to you the blessed words of Jesus, "I will give to him that is athirst of the water of life freely," but forget to add the solemn assurance, "no man without holiness shall see the Lord;"‡ and the still more tremendous declaration, "the wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God?"|| We are "stewards," brethren! "of the mysteries of God," and "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful,"§ but we should not be faithful, if we omitted these things; we should be unfaithful to God, unfaithful to you, unfaithful to ourselves; for while we were crying peace, peace, where there is no peace, and leaving sinners to perish for lack of knowledge, we should be

* 2 Tim. ii. 19. † Tit. ii. 11. ‡ Heb. xii. 14. || Psal, ix. 17. § 1 Cor. iv. 1-2.

dishonouring God, ruining your everlasting interests, and subjecting ourselves to the fearful sentence, "their blood will I require at your hands."*

It is a matter of peculiar joy, however, to reflect, that while there are demands and threatenings, which cannot be omitted or softened, out of respect for man, there are promises, "exceeding great and precious promises," which must not be obscured or withheld, from any mistrust of God. The Gospel must be proclaimed, with *all its transcendent privileges*. Is it a privilege, brethren, to have our sins forgiven? "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God."† Is it a privilege to hold communion with our Maker and Redeemer? "Our fellowship is with the father and with his son Jesus Christ."‡ Is it a privilege to have God's spirit dwelling in us? "Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost"|| Is it a privilege to have adequate assistance for the discharge of our duty? "My grace," says the Redeemer, "is sufficient for you."§ Is it a privilege to have constant access to God in prayer, to know that our petitions shall be answered? "We may come with boldness to the throne of grace," and "this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will he heareth us."¶ Or, lastly, is it a privilege to look beyond the precincts of the tomb, to lift up our eyes above the polluted scenes of this world, to those everlasting Hills where the God of glory reigns, and the innumerable company of bright and blessed spirits exult under the light of his countenance? "we are begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible, unde-

* Ezek. xxxiii. 3. † Rom. v. i. ‡ 1 John i. 3. || 1 Cor. iii. 16. § 2 Cor. xii. 9. ¶ 1 John v. 14.

filed, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."* These, brethren! are blessed privileges; and they are all included in the Gospel grant. They form a part of our message to sinners, and they are to be preached to you, in all their freeness, without the slightest reserve or hesitation, as if they were too great for God to impart, or too sacred for man to aspire to.

In making these remarks, my brethren, I have given you a summary of the gospel; and, at the same time, an outline of that message, which from time to time, has been delivered to you by God's appointed ministers. The question then arises, is this same message to be repeated in your ears, or is something else to be sought for, which without perhaps contradicting its statements, may, at least, avoid its peculiarities, and come to you invested with the attractions of novelty? I have no hesitation in saying, that, if this be the Gospel of Christ (and I doubt not, it is, in sum and substance that gospel) necessity is laid upon us, most strictly to adhere to it, in all our ministrations.—For,

1st. It is *Christ's command* that we should do so. He does not authorise us to go forth to mankind with any other message, or to substitute for its plain and simple truths, any plan of man's devising, any scheme that is more adapted to our own predilections, or which may seem to us more suited to advance the great cause of religion. But he says—What? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."†

* 1 Pet. i. 3, 5.

† Mark xvi. 16.

2. Further, it is *God's appointed instrument to save the soul*. Hence the Apostle terms it, in writing to the Ephesians, "the gospel of their salvation;"* and in the epistle to Titus, after summing up the chief truths of the gospel, telling him that salvation was of grace, that it was traceable not to "works of righteousness on the part of man, but to the kindness and love of God, and was effected in the soul by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," he adds, "and these things" (mark the expression, brethren, and '*these things*,' the things he had just been stating), "I will that thou affirm *constantly*"—and he adds the reason—"that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works."† This is an important passage. It tells us plainly what our duty is, as the ministers of Christ, and why it is our duty, because upon these great leading truths, these fundamental principles of the gospel, the whole practical part of christianity must rest.—On the one hand there can be no thoroughly right practice, no really good work, without the knowledge and adoption of these principles, and on the other, where these principles are fully known and truly seated in the heart, they must inevitably lead to such practical results, as will bring benefit to man and glory to God. This is unquestionably the doctrine of the Divine word, and this is also sustained by our own experience and observation. Most sincerely, brethren, I can say, that neither in this country, where for fifteen years I have had my attention turned to the subject, nor in that favoured land I have so lately quitted, have I ever seen any effectual benefits produced by mere moral preaching. It leaves men precisely where it finds them, neither moral nor

* Ephes. i. 13.

† Tit. iii. 8.

religious ; but on the other hand where the vital principles of the gospel are urged with plainness and simplicity—where man's depravity and God's mercy are plainly set forth—where the Cross of Christ is held up to view, and the Spirit's work is clearly taught, there sinners are convinced, and hearts converted ; and men " are turned from darkness to light, from sin to holiness, and from the power of Satan unto the living God."

3. I would add—and the consideration is a very solemn one, that *this Gospel is the criterion by which we are to be tried at the bar of Heaven.* I enter not here upon the considerations of the state and prospects of those unhappy beings, who sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, have never been made acquainted with Christ and his great salvation. We may commit the Jew in his prejudices, the Mahometan in his sensuality, and the Heathen in his blindness, to the decision of the infinitely wise God, convinced as we may well be, that the judge of all the earth will do right ; but for ourselves, my brethren, we may be well assured, there is but one test, but one criterion, and that is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. By this we must stand or fall. It will prove to each of us in the end, " a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death."* There can be no divesting ourselves of the solemn responsibilities under which the proclamation of the gospel places us. The day is approaching, however we may carelessly put aside the consideration of it, when " God will judge the secrets of men *according to this Gospel,*"† " When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them *that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"‡ And

* 2 Cor. ii. 16.

† Rom. ii. 16.

‡ 2 Thess. i. 8.

can there be a more solemn reason for declaring fully and plainly, and perseveringly, this Gospel of the blessed God?

There cannot be ; nor can there be a stronger one, why those to whom it is preached should listen to it, with profound attention. Then, brethren, put the question to your own hearts ; how stands the case with you in this particular ? You have had this Gospel preached to you ; have you *received* it ? received it not merely as a matter of theory, but of heartfelt experience ? received it into the honest and good heart, which under the dew of the divine blessing, can afford it both depth and nourishment, and protection ? I beg of you, brethren, and affectionately entreat you to examine yourselves faithfully in this matter. Do not refuse the investigation. Do not defer it. You are hastening onward to the bar of God. A single year makes many changes among us. Some faces that I have been familiar with a twelvemonth ago, are no longer to be recognised amongst us. Where are they, brethren ? Where you will shortly be—at the bar of Heaven. Oh how happy will it be for you then, if you have listened to the Gospel message ; listened to it, I mean, with effect. Upon this simple point your destiny through countless ages will depend. There can be no change, no evasion, no substitution of any thing else as an equivalent for this. You may be regular in attending upon forms, and correct and amiable in the eyes of the world ; but the word of inspiration must stand. “ If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.”* “ He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth in him.”†

* 2 Cor. iv. 3.

† 1 John v. 12.

No doubt, my brethren, some of you have received these truths, but can it be said of you that they are "*the Gospel wherein ye stand?*" i. e. in which you are fixed, established, stable? Have you no doubts or misgivings upon these points? Have no changes taken place in your hearts within the last few months? Are there none who were once zealous for God, but are now cold and lukewarm? None who were once devoted to Christ, but who are now looking back upon the world? Alas! my brethren, lukewarmness cannot make you happy. The world cannot make you happy. It is the Gospel and the Gospel alone, received in its truth, understood in its discoveries, bowed to in its demands, enjoyed in its privileges, that can confer upon you this precious privilege. May the Lord of Heaven impress you with this conviction, and lead you to take your stand for time and for eternity upon that word of the living God, which like its glorious author, shall live and abide forever.

It is that word, my brethren, and that word alone, which in renewing among you the exercise of my ministry, I desire to take as my guide and counsellor. May God enable me, on all occasions, to speak in simplicity the truth, as it is in Jesus and you to receive in faith, that engrafted word, which is able to save your souls!* *Amen.*

* James i. 21.

