

SERMON XIX.

The Strong Man Conquered.

Luke 11:21, 22.

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his amour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

THE occasion of these words was this; our Lord, whose business it was to go about doing good, and whose miraculous power was continually exerted to support his mission, and confirm his doctrine, had dispossessed a man of a devil, to the great astonishment of the one part of the people, and the envy and confusion of the other; who, though they could not deny the matter of fact, that the devil was really cast out, this being done in the sight of all the people; yet they endeavored to lessen the miracle and its author in their esteem, by malicious suggestions, that it was done by the power of *Satan*. But some of them said, *He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils.*¹ On this our Lord, who was intimately acquainted with the thoughts of their hearts, shows the absurdity of their reasoning, by observing, that *Satan* was a wiser tyrant than to destroy his own kingdom, and that the true reason why he made no effectual resistance was, because he was attacked by a force superior to his own. This he illustrates by a very apt similitude, part of which I have now chosen as the subject: of my discourse. In which we may observe,

- I. The description given of *Satan*. He is, as a *strong man armed*.
- II. The misery of every natural man, while such, set forth by *Satan*, this cruel tyrant's keeping his *palace*, in the soul. There he sits as lord and king,
- III. We may observe the fatal security that attends the soul in this miserable condition. All the while, *his goods are in peace*.

¹ Luke 11:15.

IV. We have a glorious description of our blessed Saviour, as one that is *stronger than this strong man armed*. When *a stronger than he shall come upon him, &c.* And then,

V, And lastly, we have an account of the method, in which the captain of our salvation conquers, and dethrones *this strong man armed, and that is, he comes upon him, and overcomes him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

Thus I have given you the division of the text: each part of which might furnish us with sufficient matter for a discourse: but I shall chuse rather at this time to insist some what briefly upon them all, and to make some suitable application as I go along, But before I proceed, it may not be amiss to observe, that the immediate design of our Lord in these words, when compared with the context, seems to be to confute the unbelieving *Jews*; and so they carry in them a direct proof of the superior power of *Christ* to that of *Satan*; that at his pleasure he could dispossess him. But, as *all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is of no private interpretation*, and as other miracles of our Saviour were not only real in themselves, and designed to confirm his mission and doctrine, but are frequently used to convey spiritual instruction in a figurative manner; so we may safely take the words in the sense I have already given of them, as presenting us with a very lively description of the miserable condition of a sinner, in his natural and unregenerate state, and of his deliverance by the power and grace of *Christ*. This I thought necessary to premise, that none might charge me with fathering a sense of my own upon scripture, in contradistinction to that of the Holy Ghost. But to begin,

I. With the account we have here of Satan: he is compared to a *strong man, yea, to a strong man armed.*

1. Satan is compared to a *strong man*, and that because of his natural strength as an angel. It is true, he hath undoubtedly lost a great deal by his fall but how far this hath had an influence upon that original strength which he had as an angel of the highest rank, is what neither I, nor any man can pretend peremptorily to determine. That he is still exceeding powerful will appear, if we consider the names which are given him in scripture, such as *the prince of the power of the air,*² *the god of this world,*³ and a roaring lion,⁴

² Ephesians 2:2.

which you know is allowed to be one of the strongest of the brute creation. He is also called the *dragon*, that *old serpent*,⁵ and the like. All which plainly imply, that he still retains abundance of strength. So that he may justly be compared to a *strong man*. Again,

2. He is said to be a *strong man armed*; and this may be upon many accounts.

(1.) As he is *armed* with power: this I have shown you under the last head, as he is compared to a *strong man*.

(2.) He is *armed* with malice; he is an inveterate enemy to God, and all his creatures. Thus as a *roaring lion* he *walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*.⁶ He would doubtless be glad, if we can suppose a spirit in the utmost torment, to be capable of any kind of joy, I say, is any thing could give him any pleasure, it would be, to see God dethroned, and the whole creation destroyed. Again,

(3.) He is *armed* with policy. On this account the apostle says to the *Ephesians*, *Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*.⁷ And so in the epistle to the *Corinthians*, he is represented as having *blinded the minds of them which believe not*.⁸ He is not only a powerful enemy, and so compared, as you have heard, to a roaring lion, but a subtle one too, and thus he is compared to a *serpent* which lies in wait to deceive. The apostle says, *we are not ignorant of his devices*:⁹ by which he signifies that he is an artful adversary, and that he makes use of all possible stratagems to deceive poor souls. And he is the better fitted for this, as in the next place,

(4.) He is armed with experience. He hath not been the grand deceiver of mankind, down from his first fatal attempt upon our first parents until now, without vast improvements in this wicked and destructive work. Everyday increases his experience, and every sinner he tempts furnishes him with more knowledge how to suit his baits to the various confutations and

³ 2 Corinthians 4:4.

⁴ 1 Peter 5:8.

⁵ Revelation 20:2.

⁶ 1 Peter 5:8.

⁷ Ephesians 6:11.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:4.

⁹ Chap. 2:11.

circumstances of men. If one snare will not do, he will try another. And remember withal that he is an incessant enemy, who continually goes about endeavoring to do mischief. Thus this cruel adversary is justly said to be *armed*, as he is armed with strength, with malice, policy, and experience.

And is he so? To apply it as we go along, then from hence we may learn, how unequal a match we are, in ourselves, for him. The strongest saint, as well as the most daring and self sufficient sinner, is in himself as nothing before him. Know we not in ourselves how to think a good thought, how much less then, to encounter so crafty and potent an enemy? Is it not a piece of the highest presumption, for any of us to enter the lists with him in our own strength? This, let me tell you, is one of the strong holds of *Satan*: if he can persuade the soul that he is equal to the combat in his own strength, then it is that he is almost sure of victory. Let us then, as this is our duty, nay, and let me add, our privilege too, when we are tempted, look unto *Jesus* who only can secure us. But,

II. The next thing observable in our text, is the miserable state of a sinner before conversion; *the strong man armed keepeth his palace*, or reigns in his soul: he takes up his residence there, as a king; doth his pleasure, all things go according to his will; he rules as lord, and reigns without control in the heart, till it is renewed by divine grace. It is observable, that it is not only said that he *dwells* there, as *in his palace*, but he keeps it, he keeps it to himself. God and *Christ* shall not have the least room there; no, *Satan* will have it all; he keeps his palace, or the soul of the sinner from every thing that is good, and, as far as he is permitted, fills it with every thing that hath a tendency to procure its ruin. Thus he *keeps his palace*. And I persuade myself, I need not go about to show you, that, while this is the case, the soul must needs be miserable. For can a person be other wise than miserable, who is a slave to the worst of tyrants? Are we ready to say, and with the greatest reason, that the condition or state, even of a private person, that is in subjection to a cruel tyrant, is miserable? How much more must that soul be so, who is under the bondage of sin and *Satan*? An earthly tyrant, at the worst, can only kill the body; but this enemy levels his greatest force against the soul. He is not content with bringing the sinner often into shame and poverty here; but nothing less than everlasting destruction hereafter, will satisfy this cruel adversary. Death you know puts an end to all the malicious pursuits of other enemies; and this to a good man, when under the most sensible ill usage he can meet with in this world, is a very quieting consideration, that he shall meet with a secure retreat in the grave whither he

is hastening; for there, as Job speaks, *the wicked cease from troubling: and there the weary are at rest.*¹⁰ But alas! When a man is a slave to Satan, unless grace prevent, the result will be such horror and misery as are beyond all description, and of which the heart of man can form no proper conception. Thus you see in how miserable a state and condition that man is, whose soul is *the palace* of the devil. It is without doubt abundantly more deplorable, than for a person to be bodily possessed by that mischievous and mighty adversary. The case that we have in our context, before our Lord administered help to the poor creature, was not by a thousandth part so sad, as is the condition of every unregenerate soul; for that was only an unhappiness, involving no crime or guilt in it; whereas guilt is inseparable, where *Satan* has the possession of the soul. Again, in the one, *Satan's* principal influence is on the members of the body; in the other, the faculties of the soul are under his direction, and abused at his pleasure. Thus miserable is the case of those who are willing slaves to sin and Satan, in whose souls he *keeps his palace*.

And is it so then? How natural is it from hence to infer, the grand mistake of those, who from their being in easy circumstances, though utter strangers to the grace of God, conclude they are really happy? It is true, as to this world; perhaps, they may have more than heart could wish: though this rarely happens, for riches, as they are in themselves uncertain, so they are in their enjoyment unsatisfying. But, I say, admit they may look upon themselves as completely happy, or let this be the judgment of others concerning them, yet, if this is the true state of their case, that the *strong man armed keeps his palace in their souls*, they are of all persons the most miserable. Which leads us to the next thing, I proposed to consider in the words, to wit,

III. The aggravating circumstance that heightens, nay, may we not say, completes their misery, namely, their fatal security: while in this sad condition, their goods are in peace, their souls are easy and calm, as is all were right and well. They have peace indeed, such an one as it is; not that *peace of conscience that passeth all understanding*, which is the result of an interest in pardoning love; no, their peace is merely external, ungrounded confidence, arising, either, from a want of thought, or else from wrong notions of God himself; as, that he is all mercy, and has little or no regard to justice, or that they stand upon very good terms with him, since they are

¹⁰ Job 3:17.

such as are commonly called morally honest, and good natured men. Thus they hug themselves in a false peace, *few pillows* of deceit under their own elbows,¹¹ and say, as the fool in the gospel. *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*¹² And observe it, while this is the case, *Satan* careth not how little he disturbs them. He is well enough contented, so he may but *keep the palace*, whatever the soul may think of it; because he knows what will be the fatal consequence of it in the end, unless grace prevent. And is not this a most melancholy condition indeed? What! *Satan keeps the palace*, or reign lord supreme in my heart, and yet I as easy as if *Christ* had set up his throne there! Should we not say concerning a person intoxicated with liquor, or in a dead sleep in the midst of flames, alas! Poor creature, he doth not know his own danger? Why, let me tell you, and it is enough to make every unregenerate soul tremble, this is but a faint resemblance of the real misery of poor sinners. Should we be easy in the paws of a furious wild beast? And shall we then be calm and unaffected while our souls are under the power of *Satan*, that savage and devouring lion? This is a most melancholy case indeed! I know no more how to set forth the danger and misery of such a condition, than I know how to paint all the glories of the heavenly state. The Lord grant that what I have said of it may not prove without its use, if there should be any here, of whom it may be said. They lie as it were fast asleep upon the very brink of hell. But to apply this to ourselves,

1. Was this once the case of all of us? That is, did we, whilst in an unconverted state, hug our chains, rest easy and satisfied with our bondage, without either considering or regarding the consequences of it? What an humbling consideration should this be? How may this convince us of our natural blindness and stupidity? O let us frequently remember *the rock from whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit from whence we were digged*, in order to keep us low in our own eyes and esteem, and to raise our thoughts and apprehensions of rich and sovereign grace! But then,

2. Should there be any here, who just begin to be blest with some glimmerings of light, so that they are convinced that their state as sinners, is the most deplorable in the world, why, what shall we say to such, but as it was said in another case, *Look to Christ* for strength to enable you to *escape for your lives*,¹³ to flee from the slavery of sin and *Satan*, into the glorious

¹¹ Ezek. 13:18.

¹² Luke 12:19.

¹³ Genesis 19:17.

liberty of the children of God? That is, pray earnestly for the Spirit of God to lead you to Christ, and *if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*¹⁴ And give me leave to say, is you have peace spoken to you any other way, but as interested in *Christ*, or as justified through his righteousness, unless grace prevent, it will issue in nothing, but *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.* But,

IV. The next thing remarkable in our text, is the account we have of our dear Redeemer, as one who *is stronger than this strong man armed.* As we are told there is a *roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour,* so likewise we are informed, that there is the lion of the *tribe of Judah*¹⁵ who is *Stronger* than he, and who is *mighty to save.* And that,

1. As he is the *most high* God. In this view, the devils are as nothing before him. He holds the end of the chain with which they are bound, and can restrain or enlarge their power at his pleasure. As he was the creator of all things, so he not only made all the angels in heaven and devil in hell, but he hath them all under his absolute command, and can do with them what he pleases. Thus he is *stronger than this strong man armed.* Again,

2. He is so, when we consider him as our Mediator and surety. As he is King in Zion, so he is *far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name, that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.*¹⁶ It is true, he, for wise ends, permits Satan to set up his strong holds in the hearts even of his own children, yet he can at his pleasure dispossess him. As cunning, as malicious, and as powerful as our great enemy is; yet, it is our comfort, that in all things our blessed *Jesus* is above him. And is he thus stronger than the strong man armed? Then,

(1.) What high thoughts should we entertain of our dear Lord? Let us not only view him as our Surety, but as our Maker, our Lord and Governor, and so be filled with awful apprehensions of his Majesty. Again,

(2.) What a comforting consideration should this be to those who are followed with temptations? To whom should they look, but to Jesus who is above this *strong man*, and can restrain his attempts on his people, when, and how he pleases? But then,

¹⁴ John 8:36.

¹⁵ Revelation 5:5.

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:21.

V. And lastly, we have here an account of the method, in which this *lion of the tribe of Judah* subdues, and dethrones the old serpent the devil, and drives him out of the hearts of his people.

1. It is said; *he will come upon him and overcome him*. And this he did, if we refer it to the atonement which he made to divine justice, upon the account of sinners, in order to redeem them from the curse of the law, and the wrath of God; *for there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus*.¹⁷ And, says the same apostle, having blotted out the hand writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, he took it out of the way, *nailing it to his cross: and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it*.¹⁸ This he did, I say, as by one offering he paid their debt, and rescued them from impending vengeance. Thus, according to that ancient promise, *the seed of the woman bruised the head of the serpent*. Satan perhaps thought all was sure, upon the fall of man, that he had fully accomplished his design: but he finds himself mistaken with respect to the elect. *Christ comes upon him and overcomes him, by pouring out his own soul unto death*, and making it an offering for their sins. And as the result of this,

3. He despoils Satan of all his amour *he takes from him all his amour wherein he trusted*. That is, *having come upon him and overcome him*, by working out a complete salvation by his satisfaction for his people; when, in consequence of this, the appointed time comes, the day of their being brought home to God, he dethrones Satan as to his dominion in their souls: and this he doth, not only by retraining and preventing the effects of his malice and power, but by the continual communications of grace and strength, by which the believer is enabled to overcome him. Thus if you refer it to Satan, *Christ takes away his amour*. But if we should apply this, (as I do not see any reason why we may not) to sinners themselves, the meaning is this: He takes away their amour in which they trusted. That is, he shows them the vanity of their former confidence, and, instead of suffering them to lean on their own righteousness, as in time past, he leads them to himself, as the only object of their trust, and foundation of their comfort. Thus *he takes away their amour wherein they trusted*. That which before

¹⁷ Romans 8:1.

¹⁸ Colossians 2:14, 15.

was gain to the souls of men, now they count as loss. They are brought to look upon themselves as destitute of every other refuge, save what they find in *Jesus Christ*. And then,

4. He *divideth his spoils*. Christ justly takes the triumphs of the victory to himself, the spoils of principalities and powers, of which he makes an open shew; he divides them in a proper proportion among victorious believers. And, according to the other view also, with respect to gracious converts, having stripped them of all their former confidence, he bestows on them such graces as are the blessed fruits and effects of the victory. In one word, just as the general of an army, after the battle is over, and a conquest is gained, distributes the spoils among the victorious soldiers; so our Lord *Jesus* the great *Captain of our salvation*, having taken away all Satan's soul-destroying amour, gives to the soul some special tokens of its interest in this blessed victory. And having by his spirit *dethroned Satan*, he sets up his own kingdom in the hearts of his people. From the whole we may infer,

(1.) That if it must be a stronger than *the strong men armed that must come upon him*, in order to his being overcome; then, how plain is it, that in the conversions a sinner there must be a divine power exerted? It is a piece of the highest folly and presumption, for any of us to think, that we can change our own hearts, or *dethrone Satan* by our resolutions, our reasoning's, the performance of duty, or the like. No, it is nothing but the power of him who is almighty that can effect it. It must be one that *is stronger than Satan* himself that can do this. And who is that, but the Lord of heaven an earth? Again,

(2.) Have any of us felt the power of God's grace in the *removing Satan* from the throne he had set up in our hearts? This surely a comfortable evidence that Christ hath *taken from him all his amour*, so as that he shall never be able to do us any final damage. If this be our case, O how highly are we privileged! Under what obligations are we to love and rejoice in our God! O how solicitous should we be to be the most thankful and fruitful of all persons in the world! Should we not look back to Egypt, and consider from whence we have been delivered? Believe me; the tyranny of this adversary is a thousand times worse than *Egyptian* bondage. And have we obtained a deliverance from it? Is this the happy case of any of us? Should not then the high praises of God dwell upon our hearts? And,

(3.) And lastly, is not this a sufficient encouragement for us to wait upon the Lord, and believe, that as he hath thus far delivered, so he will go on to deliver? It is surely our duty, and privilege, under the remains of indwelling corruption, and the temptations of *Satan*, to look unto *Jesus*, who will bruise him still more under our feet, and will do it shortly. He has engaged, in the end, to make his people *more than conquerors*. To whom then should we have recourse, on all occasions of danger, but to him who knows how to restrain the power of this outrageous and malicious enemy, or to administer proper support, when we are assaulted by him? Remember *he is stronger than the strong man armed*. And though, at times, Satan presses very hard upon us, and, God knows, too often gains the victory, yet, as our dear Redeemer can bring good out of the worst of evils, so remember he hath told us, *that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according so his purpose*.¹⁹

¹⁹ Romans 8:28.