

“Thus Saith The Lord ” Or, The Book of Common Prayer Weighed in the Balances of the Sanctuary

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon powerfully emphasizes that the ultimate authority and power in the church and life come solely from the divine command 'Thus saith the Lord,' urging believers to submit exclusively to God's Word above all human traditions and opinions.

Scripture: Ezekiel 11:15, Genesis 1:3, Isaiah 9:6, Jeremiah 1:4, Deuteronomy 4:2, Matthew 5:19, Psalm 119:103, 1 Samuel 15:22

Topics: "Authority of Scripture", "Power of God's Word"

Description

In this compelling sermon, C.H. Spurgeon expounds on the supreme authority and power of God's Word, encapsulated in the phrase 'Thus saith the Lord.' He challenges believers to reject human traditions and opinions that contradict Scripture and to embrace the divine commands as the foundation for faith, obedience, and reformation. Spurgeon also warns of the grave consequences of disregarding God's Word and encourages a steadfast reliance on Scripture for comfort and guidance. This sermon is a clarion call to uphold the integrity and sovereignty of God's revealed truth in all aspects of Christian life and church practice.

Transcript

“Thus saith the Lord.”—Ezekiel 11:15.

THE WISE MAN saith, “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” What power must there be where there is the word of the King of kings, who ruleth over all! We are not left to conjecture as to the power of the divine word, for we know that “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” Out of nothingness the glorious creation leaped at the bidding of the Most High, and when the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, there was nothing wanted but that solemn voice, “Light be,” and straightway light was. God’s word was sufficient in itself to build the temple of the universe and to finish it from its foundations to its pinnacles. That same word upholdeth by its power, and ruleth all things by its might. The pillars of heaven stand because the divine word hath fixed them upon their bases, nor shall they be shaken until that same almighty word shall bid them remove; then as a moment’s foam dissolves into the wave which bears it and

is gone forever, so shall the whole creation melt away. His word, which created, shall also destroy; but until that word be spoken every atom of this world is imperishable. Consider, my brethren, what power is concentrated in him who is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and whose name is "THE WORD OF GOD." With what glorious power our Lord Jesus Christ uplifted the burden of our sins, carried the load up to the tree, and cast it forever into the Red Sea of his own atoning blood! Ye know how he burst the bars of death, tore away the gates of the grave, overthrew all the hosts of hell, and dragged the mightiest principalities of darkness as captives at his chariot wheels. At this day the government is upon his shoulders, and his name is the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. Heaven and earth salute him as the Omnipotent Word. He sustains the spiritual life of all his people by feeding them upon himself; and he shall in due time perfect his saints, and present them without spot before his Father's throne. We ought, therefore, to bow with reverence to that which is truly the word of God, since it contains within itself the highest degree of power, and is ever the way in which divine omnipotence manifests itself.

It is in the word that we must find wisdom and power, "because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The faintest whisper of Jehovah's voice should fill us with a solemn awe, and command the deepest obedience of our souls. Brethren, how careful should we be that we do not set up in God's temple anything in opposition to his word, that we do not permit the teachings of a creature to usurp the honor due to the Lord alone! "Thus saith antiquity," "thus saith authority," "thus saith learning," "thus saith experience,"—these be but idol-gods, which defile the temple of God; be it yours and mine, as bold iconoclasts, to dash them in pieces without mercy, seeing that they usurp the place of the word of God.

"Thus saith the Lord"—this is the motto of our standard, the war-cry of our spiritual conflict,—the sword with which we hope yet to smite through the loins of the mighty who rise up against God's truth. Nothing shall stand before this weapon in the day when God cometh out of his hiding-place; for even at this hour, when "Thus saith the Lord" sounds from the trumpet of the Lord's ministers, the hosts of Midian begin to tremble; for well they know the might of that terrible watchword in days of yore.

This morning, I shall first endeavor to show, briefly, the value of a "Thus saith the Lord;" and then, secondly, I shall, with as much calmness of spirit as I can command, request a "Thus faith the Lord" for certain things which are received and practiced in the State Establishment of our land, and close with a word of personal application, beseeching you to seek a "Thus saith the Lord" for any hopes which you may entertain of being partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

I. LET US CONSIDER THE VALUE OF A "THUS SAITH THE LORD."

1. Our first observation is that it is the minister's message. If he be God's minister, he does not found his teaching upon his own authority, for then his message would be only that of himself, and not to be esteemed; but he shows the authority of his Master, and none can gainsay him. He claims men's attention on the ground that he utters a "Thus saith the Lord." No matter how aged he may be, he does not proclaim the truth as merely the result of his long investigations or his extraordinary experience, but he grounds it upon "Thus saith the Lord." So spake the hoary-headed Joshua when for many a year he had known the faithfulness of God, and was about to die. He was singing his swan-song, preaching his last sermon; but he did not commence it, "Thus saith my age," "Thus say I upon mine own authority," but "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel." A God-sent minister is the ambassador of the Most High, but he has no right to go beyond his commission; and when he does so, his office cannot yield him support. The prophets of God did not say, "Thus I speak as a prophet," but, "Thus saith the Lord." When the prophet came in Gideon's

days and spoke to erring Israel, he opened his mouth with, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel." Turn to the pages of Isaiah, and mark how frequent he quotes the divine authority; study the plaintive words of Jeremiah, and observe how solemnly his prophetic woes are prefaced with, "Thus saith the Lord;" and the soaring Ezekiel, to whom was given, as it were, six wings, that he might take more lofty flights than the eagle knoweth—even he relied not upon the sublimity of his language or the glory of his imagery, but found the sinews of his strength in "Thus saith the Lord God." This is the trowel and this the hammer of God's builders,—this the trumpet of his watchmen and the sword of his warriors. Woe to the man who comes in any other name! If we, or an angel from heaven, shall preach unto you anything but a "Thus saith the Lord," no matter what our character or standing, give no heed to us, but cleave unto the truth as it is in Jesus. To the law and to the testimony, if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us. That test which we demand to be exercised upon others we cheerfully consent to be exercised upon ourselves, praying that we may have grace to forsake our errors as we would have other men forsake theirs.

2. "Thus saith the Lord" is the only authority in God church. When the tabernacle was pitched in the wilderness, what was the authority for its length and breadth? Why was the altar of incense to be placed here, and the brazen laver there? Why so many lambs or bullocks to be offered on a certain day? Why must the Passover be roasted whole and not sodden? Simply and only because God had shown all these things to Moses in the holy mount; and thus had Jehovah spoken, "Look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount." It is even so in the church at the present day; true servants of God demand to see for all church ordinances and doctrines the express authority of the church's only Teacher and Lord. They remember that the Lord Jesus bade the apostles to teach believers to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them; but he neither gave to them nor to any man power to alter his own commands. The Holy Ghost revealed much of precious truth and holy precept by the apostles, and to his teaching we would give earnest heed; but when men cite the authority of fathers and councils and bishops, we give place for subjection? no, not for an hour. They may quote Irenaeus or Cyprian, Augustine or Chrysostom; they may remind us of the dogmas of Luther or Calvin; they may find authority in Simeon, Wesley, or Gill—we will listen to the opinions of those great men with the respect which they deserve as men; but having so done, we deny that we have anything to do with these men as authorities in the church of God: for there nothing has any authority but "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts." Yea, if you shall bring us the concurrent consent of all tradition—if you shall quote precedents venerable with fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen centuries of antiquity—we burn the whole as so much worthless lumber, unless you put your finger upon the passage of Holy Writ which warrants the matter to be of God. You may further plead, in addition to all this venerable authority, the beauty of the ceremony, and its usefulness to those who partake therein, but this is all foreign to the point; for to the true church of God the only question is this: Is there a "Thus saith the Lord" for it? And if divine authority be not forthcoming, faithful men thrust forth the intruder as the cunning craftiness of men.

3. "Thus saith the Lord" is the most fitting word of rebuke for erring saints. God's people when they err, if they be rebuked, even though it should be in the gentlest manner, are too apt to resent the rebuff; but when we can come to them with "Thus saith the Lord," if there be a spark of spiritual life left, it is sure to catch at this flame. When the man of God came to Eli, how Eli's heart trembled when he began, "Thus saith the Lord," and described to him the doom of his house, because his sons had made themselves vile, and he had not restrained them. David the king might have been moved to anger against Nathan for that personal parable and pungent application; but his anger was stayed, nay, better still, his heart was broken, because the prophet could say, "Thus saith the Lord." My dear brethren in Christ, you and I have often

risen in anger at the intrusive proofs of ignorant men; but I hope we have far more often felt the melting power of a "Thus saith the Lord." When the heart is right, the word of God sweetly melts us, as the breath of the south wind melts the frozen rivers.

4. "Thus saith the Lord" is the only solid ground of comfort to God's people. Where can a child of God find true solace apart from that which cometh out of the mouth of the Most High! Truly, "Man doth not live by bread alone; but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God doth man live;" "Thy words were found, and I did eat them;" "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" When Nathan came to tell David of the covenant which the Lord would make with him and his house, David would scarcely have believed so great a mercy to be really his if the prophet had not began with "Thus saith the Lord." It was not "Thus saith Nathan," or "Thus do the ancients say," but "Thus saith the Lord;" and David's heart was full of holy joy when he saw the covenant to be ordered in all things and sure. When Hezekiah lay sick unto death, he turned his face to the wall and prayed; but there was no comfort to the royal suppliant until the prophet came with "Thus saith the Lord;" and when Sennacherib was about to besiege Jerusalem, and Lachish had fallen, Hezekiah prayed, and the people with him; but oh! they could not think it possible that there should be a hook put into the jaw of the mighty Assyrian, and that he should be turned back by the way in which he came, till the prophet reassured their hearts with a "Thus saith the Lord." Zion's sons and daughters feast upon the sure word of their faithful God. Brethren, I need not enlarge here, for I hope most of you know the preciousness of a divine promise. There is nothing wanted to stay your soul in your worst troubles but the Word of God applied with power. God may not send you a friend; he may not raise up a deliverer; but if he shall only give you to believe his Word, that shall be enough for you. Martin Luther said: "I have covenanted with my Lord that he should not send me visions, or dreams, or even angels. I am content with this one gift of the Scriptures, which abundantly teaches and supplies all that is necessary, both for this life and that which is to come." O Lord, only feed me on thy Word, and I will not envy kings their delicacies, nor even the angels around thy throne the bread of heaven on which they live.

5. Yet again: "Thus saith the Lord" is that with which we must confront the Lord's enemies. When Moses went in before Pharaoh, the words which he used were not, "The elders of Israel have consulted, and thus have they bidden me say," not "Our Father Abraham once said, and his words have been handed to us by long tradition"—such talk would have been readily resisted; but he confronted the haughty monarch with "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go;" and it was the power of this divine word which rained plagues upon the fields of Zoan, and brought forth the captives, with silver and gold. Pharaoh might boast, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" but ere long he knew that Jehovah's word was mightier than all the horsemen and chariots of Mizraim, and was not to be resisted without terrible defeat. To this day, if we would break sinners' hearts, our hammer must be "Thus saith the Lord;" and if we would woo them to obedience to King Jesus, our reasons must come from his own Word. I have often noticed in conversion, that, though sometimes a particular passage of the sermon may be quoted by the converted person as the means of enlightenment, yet in the majority of cases it is the text, or some passage of Scripture, quoted during the sermon, which is blessed to do the work. McCheyne says, "Depend upon it, it is God's Word, not our comment upon God's Word, that saves souls;" and so it is. Let us use much of Scripture, much of the pure silver of sacred revelation, and no human alloy. "What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?"

6. To close this point. Such an authority has a "Thus saith the Lord," that it is not to be despised without entailing upon the offender the severest penalty. Samuel came to Saul with "Thus saith the Lord," and bade him destroy the Amalekites. He was utterly to cut them off, and not to spare so much as one of them.

But Saul saved the best of the cattle and the sheep, and brought home Agag; and what was the result? His kingdom was taken from him and given to a neighbor of his that was better than he; and because he exalted himself beyond measure to do otherwise than according to the letter of God's command, he was put away forever from having dominion over Israel. And mark this word: if any church in Christendom shall continue, after light is given and after plain rebuke is uttered, to walk contrary to the word of God, and to teach that which is inconsistent with Holy Scripture, as Saul was put away from the kingdom, so shall that church be put away from before the Lord of Hosts; and if any man, be he who he may, after receiving light from on high, continues willfully to shut his eyes, he shall not, if an heir of heaven, be rejected from eternal salvation, but he shall be cast off from much of the usefulness and comfort which he might otherwise have enjoyed. He knew his Master's will, and did it not: he shall be beaten with many stripes. He has been as the horse or the mule which have no understanding, and his mouth shall be held in with bit and bridle. Many sorrows shall be to those who dare to dash themselves against the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler by opposing his "Thus saith the Lord." Upon whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder; and whosoever shall fall upon it shall be broken, to his own lasting damage. O my brethren! I would that we trembled and stood more in awe of God's word. I fear me that many treat the things of God as though they were merely matters of opinion, but remember that opinion cannot govern in God's house. God's word, not man's opinion, claims your allegiance. Remember that although our ignorant conscience may not accuse us of error, yet if we walk contrary to God's word, our conscientiousness does not screen us from sin; for conscience is not the sovereign arbiter of right and wrong, but the plain word of God is the rule of equity. I do not sin so foully as if I sinned against my conscience, but I still sin, if, having an unenlightened conscience, I ignorantly transgress. But if I wilfully keep my conscience in darkness, and continue in errors which I might easily know to be such by a little thought and searching of God's word, then my conscience can offer me no excuse, for I am guilty of blindfolding the guide which I have chosen, and then, knowing him to be blindfolded, I am guilty of the folly of letting him lead me into rebellion against God. O church of God! hear thou the voice of thy great Founder and Lord: "Whosoever, therefore shall one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Oh for a stern integrity, that will hold the word, and will never depart from it, come what may. This much concerning the value of a "Thus saith the Lord."

II. Dear friends, the second part of our subject may be very displeasing to some who have strayed in here, but that I cannot help. I do not remember ever asking any one to come and hear me, and therefore, as you come of your own wills, when I have any truth to speak, I shall not conceal it because you choose to be present. At the present crisis, I feel that it is woe unto me if I do not lift up my voice like a trumpet, and urge with all my might the necessity of reformation in our State Church. I have, moreover, an excellent excuse for the inquiry I am about to make; for as I am publicly charged with ignorance, it is at once my duty and my privilege to seek instruction of those who claim authority to teach. When one is known to be profoundly ignorant, and there are certain fathers in the faith who have the power to instruct, the least thing that can be allowed us is to ask questions, and the smallest boon we can expect is to have them answered by men expressly ordained to instruct the ignorant.

The Rev. W. Goode, the Dean of Ripon, appears to be much better acquainted with the extent of my reading and mental acquirements than I am myself. He speaks with all the positiveness of a personal acquaintance concerning my reputed ignorance, and for my own part I am not at all anxious to question so very reverend an authority. He writes: "As to that young minister who is now raving against the Evangelical

clergy on this point, it is to be regretted that so much notice has been taken of his railings. He is to be pitied, because his entire want of acquaintance with theological literature leaves him utterly unfit for the determination of such a question; which is a question, not of more doctrine, but of what may be called historical theology; and his charges are just a parallel to those which the Romanists would bring against himself as well as others for the interpretation of the words, 'This is my body.' But were he a wiser man than he is, he would know better what his qualifications are for passing Judgment on such a point, and be willing to learn from such facts, among others, as the Gorham Judgment and the cases of Mr. Maskell and Mr. Mozley, what ground there is for his charges against the Evangelical clergy. Let him hold and enforce his own view of doctrine as he pleases; but when he undertakes to determine what is the exclusive meaning of the Book of Common Prayer, and brings a charge of dishonesty against those who take a different view of that meaning from what he does, he only shows the presumptuous self-confidence with which he is prepared to pronounce judgment upon matters of which he is profoundly ignorant. To hold a controversy with him upon the subject would be to as little purpose as to attempt to hold a logically-constructed argument with a child unacquainted with logical terms."

When this paragraph caught my eye, my heart leaped with joy, for I knew that the sinners in Zion were afraid; and I thought I heard a voice crying from the Word, "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." My mind flew back to the valley of Elah, and I remembered the words of the old record: "And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." My spirit kindled at these words of the boastful champion of yore, and at their modern reproduction by the vainglorious divine of Ripon, and the answer of David was in my heart as it is even now upon my tongue: "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands." Admitting the witness of the venerable dean to be correct, and that "the young minister" is inexpert in logic, I am not therefore ashamed; far otherwise, I will the rather glory in mine infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me; "for when I am weak, then am I strong." Take, O ye great ones of the earth, every profit that can be made out of your belief in my utter total ignorance, and your own profound and extensive learning, and then go your ways, and learn what this meaneth: "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me. Therefore shall evil come upon thee: thou shalt not know from whence it riseth.. And now at this hour, having been condemned as intolerably ignorant, I feel I have the liberty to ask just a few explanations of those reverend divines who do know or ought to know the grounds of their faith and practice.

1. I open this little book,—the Prayer-Book, of whose occasional services the more I know the less I approve,—and I find in the Baptismal Service, that when little children are brought to be sprinkled, certain godfathers and godmothers promise for them that they shall renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, etc., and that they shall obediently

keep all God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life. To me it seems that they might as well promise that the infants should grow up with Roman noses, auburn hair, and blue eyes; for they are just as able to make them do the one as the other. I shall not however intrude my opinion further, but simply ask whether there is a "Thus saith the Lord" for any man's standing proxy for a babe, and making such promises in its name?—in other words, I ask for apostolical, prophetic, or any other form of scriptural precept, or precedent, for the use of proxies in baptism. True religion is a personal matter—is its first manifestation in regeneration to be connected with the impossible promises of others? Plain proof-texts are requested for godfathers and godmothers; and such important persons deserve to be defended by the clergy, if texts of Scripture can be discovered. As I cannot imagine where the texts will be found, I must pause till the learned shall produce them. Further, I find that these children enter into a covenant by proxy, of which we are assured that the promise our Lord Jesus will for his part most surely keep and perform; but the children are bound to do their part—that part being something more than the gigantic task of keeping all the commandments of God. Now I ask for a "Thus saith the Lord" for such a covenant as this. I find two covenants in the Word of God: one is the covenant of works, "This do, and thou shalt live;" I find another, the covenant of grace, which runs only in this wise, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." I find it expressly declared that there cannot be a mixture of works and grace; for, says Paul, "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work;" and I ask a "Thus saith the Lord" for this baptismal covenant, which is nominally of grace, but really of works, or at best an unnatural conglomerate of grace and works. I ask those who have searched Scripture through, to find me the form or the command for any baptismal covenant whatever. It is idle to say that such a covenant was allowed among the early Christians; their witness is not earlier enough for us: we want a "Thus saith the Lord," and nothing but this will justify this pretended covenant.

We then find that after this covenant has been made, and the water has been applied in a manner which we think needs also a "Thus saith the Lord" to justify it, it is publicly declared that the babe is regenerated,—“Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren that this child is regenerated and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto him, that this child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning.” And, again, “We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church,” etc. We are told we do not understand the meaning of “regeneration” as it is used in the services of the Anglican Church. The meaning of this passage is historical, hypothetical, ecclesiastical, and we know not what. The words “to be born again” did not formerly seem to us to be so very difficult to understand, nor do they appear so now as they stand in Scripture; for we find in them the one regeneration which has renewed us in the spirit of our mind, and we cannot consent to use those words in any other sense. Well, whether regeneration be or be not a very equivocal word, we simply ask, Is there a “Thus saith the Lord” for the assertion that a sprinkled infant is therefore regenerate in any sense in the world? Will any person find us a text of Scripture?—he shall have large rewards from clergymen with uneasy consciences! We put our inquiry again in plain terms, Will some one oblige us with a plain “Thus saith the Lord” proving that water baptism in any one instance makes an unconscious babe a member of Christ and a child of God, in any sense which any sane person chooses to attach to those words? Where is the passage—where? Echo answers “where?” But this subject you have been considering for some time, and are well convinced that the process of regenerating babies by occult influences conveyed by water is a pure—no, an impure—invention of priest-craft. There is therefore no necessity that I enlarge upon a point so well understood.

2. I have a second question to ask. There is prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer a peculiar ceremony called confirmation. I do not remember to have read of that in Scripture. I would like to have a "Thus saith the Lord" for that rite. As I am ready to yield as far as possible, suppose we take it for granted that this ceremony is defensible from Holy Writ, I would like to know whether there is any "Thus saith the Lord" allowing a person called a bishop to give to the assembled youths an assurance of divine favor by laying his hands on their heads? The bishop having laid his hands on every head presented to him, whether it be gracious or graceless, talks thus in the Collect, "Almighty and everliving God, who makest us both to will and to do those things that be good and acceptable unto thy divine majesty, we make our humble supplications unto thee for these thy servants upon whom (after the example of thy holy apostles) we have now laid our hands, to certify them (by this sign) of thy favor and gracious goodness towards them." Does this mean that the bishop's hand certifies the person touched thereby of special divine favor? So it seems to teach, as far as I can see. We want, then, a "Thus saith the Lord," authorizing this individual in lawn to exercise the office of an apostle! We then desire scriptural warrant permitting him to certify these kneeling youths of the enjoyment or possession of any particular divine favor by putting his hands on their heads. If this means the common goodness of God, the bishop's hands are not needed to certify them of that; but as he has already declared in prayer that they were regenerated by water and the Spirit, and had been forgiven all their sins, it is clear that special favor is intended; we inquire, therefore, for his authority for giving these young people a further certificate of special divine favor by the imposition of his hands. Why his hands? Who is he that he can certify these persons of God's favor more than any other man? Where is his scriptural warrant to confer by his hands a certificate of grace upon young people who in innumerable cases are thoughtless and unconverted, if not profane? We want a "Thus saith the Lord" for the whole thing, and then for each item in detail. Endless is the task thus proposed to the honest Churchman.

3. Another matter needs a little clearing up; and, as this Book was set forth by learned divines and bishops, I would like a lucid explanation. The priest visits a sick man, sits down by his bed-side, reads certain prayers, bids the patient remember his baptism, questions him as to his creed, gives him good advice about forgiving his enemies and making his will, moves him to make a special confession of his sin if he feels his conscience troubled with any weighty matter, after which confession the Rubric says "the priest shall absolve him" (if he humbly and heartily desire it), after this sort. Here is the absolution, and I humbly and heartily desire a "Thus saith the Lord" for it: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Sir Priest, I want you to give me a plain warrant from God's Word for your absolving my dying neighbor at this rate. Who are you that you should use such words? The season is solemn: it is the hour of death, and the matter is weighty, for it concerns the eternal interests of the dying man, and may—nay, will, if you be found to be acting presumptuously in this matter—involve your own soul in eternal ruin. Whence did you derive your right to forgive that sick man? Might he not raise his withered hands and return the compliment by absolving you? Are you quite sure as to the committal of divine authority to you? Then show me the deed of gift, and let it be clearly of divine origin. The apostles were empowered to do many things; but who are you? Do you claim to be their successors? Then work miracles similar to theirs; take up serpents, and drink deadly things without being harmed thereby; prove to us that you have seen the Lord, or even that cloven tongues of fire have sat upon each of you. You evangelical clergy, dare you claim to be successors of the apostles, and to have power to forgive sins? Your Puseyite brethren go the whole length of superstitious pretension; but you have too much light to be so superstitious; and yet you do what is quite as wicked,—you solemnly subscribe that this absolution is

not contrary to the Word of God when you know it is? Gorham case, say you. I care nothing for your Gorham case: I want a "Thus saith the Lord" warranting you to swear to what you know to be false and dangerous. Mr. Mozley and Mr. Maskell may give you all the comfort which they can afford; but one word of Peter or of Paul would be of more weight in this matter than a thousand words from either of them.

You are aware, perhaps, that it is not every man who is permitted by the Established religion to pronounce this absolution. A person called a "deacon" is, I am informed, allowed to preach and do a great many things, but when he reads the Book of Common Prayer in the daily service he must not grant absolution; there is a supernatural something which the man has not yet received, for he has only once felt the episcopal imposition of hands. We shall see, by-and-by, where absolving power comes from. The deacon has attained to one grade of priestcraft, but the full vigor of mystic influence rests not upon him. Another touch, another subscription, and the keys of St. Peter will swing at his girdle; but his time is not yet. I ask him, whether he calls himself a deacon or a priest, where he gets a "Thus saith the Lord" for this absolution? which, if it be not of God, is a piece of impertinence, superstition, blasphemy, and falsehood.

4. I turn on and find that when the sick dies he is buried in consecrated ground; and though he may have cut his throat while under delirium tremens, if the jury do not return a verdict of suicide, the priest shall say, as he casts earth upon the body, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground,—earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,—in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life." And again, "We give thee hearty thanks for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world." And yet again, "We meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth." We beg a "Thus saith the Lord" for burying every baptized thief, harlot, rogue, drunkard, and liar who may die in the parish—"in sure and certain hope of the blessed resurrection." "Oh! it is commanded by authority." What authority? We challenge it, and permit none to pass muster but a "Thus saith the Lord." Until clergymen will bring us scriptural warrant for uttering falsehoods over a grave, we dare not cease our testimony against them. How long will the many godly laymen in that Church remain quiet? Why do they not bestir themselves, and demand revision or disruption?

5. Turning a little further on, into a part of the Prayer-Book not much frequented by ordinary readers, we come to the "Ordering of Priests," or the way in which priests are made. Why priests? Is one believer more a priest than another, when all are styled a royal priesthood? Let that pass. Of course, brethren, the priests are made by the bishops, as the bishops are made by Lord Palmerston, or Lord Derby, or any other political leader who may be in office. The Prime Minister of England is the true fountain from whom all bishops flow, and the priests are minor emanations branching off from the mitre rather than the crown. Here is the way of ordering priests. Let heaven and earth hear this and be astonished: "When this prayer is done, the bishop with the priests present shall lay their hands severally upon the head of every one that receiveth the order of priesthood; the receivers humbly kneeling upon their knees, and the bishop saying, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.'" Listen to it, now! Think you behold the scene: a man of God, a bishop whom you have been in the habit of considering a most gracious, godly man, and such no doubt he may be, in a sort,—think you see him putting his hands upon the head of some evangelical man whom you will go and hear, or, if you like, upon some young rake fresh from Oxford,—and think you hear him say, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain,

they are retained." We want a "Thus saith the Lord" for that; for that is putting it rather strongly in the popish line, one would think. Is the way of ordering priests in the Church of Rome much worse than this? That the apostles did confer the Holy Ghost, we never thought of denying; but that Oxford, Exeter, or any other occupants of the bench can give the Holy Spirit, needs some proof other than their silk aprons or lawn sleeves can afford us. We ask, moreover, for one instance in which an apostle conferred upon any minister the power to forgive sins, and where it can be found in Scripture that any man other than an apostle ever received authority to absolve sinners. Sirs, let us say the truth; however much yonder priest may pretend at his parishioner's bedside to forgive sin, the man's sins are not forgiven; and the troubled conscience of the sinner often bears witness to the fact, as the day of judgment and the fearful hell of sinners must also bear witness. And what think you, sirs, must be the curse that fills the mouth of damned souls, when in another world they meet the priest who absolved them with this sham absolution! With what reproaches will such deceived ones meet the priest who sent them down to perdition with a lie in their right hands! Will they not say to him, "Thou didst forgive me all my sins by an authority committed unto thee, and yet here am I cast into the pit of hell?" Oh! if I do not clear my Soul upon this infamous business, and if the whole Christian church does not cleanse herself of it, what guilt will lay upon us! This is become a crying evil, and a sin that is not to be spoken of behind the door, nor to be handled in gentle language. I have been severe, it is said, and spoken harshly. I do not believe it possible to be too severe in this matter; but, sirs, if I have been so, let that be set down as my sin if you will; but is there any comparison between my fault and that of men who know this to be contrary to the Word of God, and yet give it their unfeigned assent and consent? or the sin of those who can lie unto the Holy Ghost, by pretending to confer Him who bloweth where he listeth upon men who as likely as not are as graceless as the very heathen? Fresh from the dissipations of college-life, the sinner bows before the man in lawn, and rises a full-blown priest, fully able to remit or retain sins. After this, how can the priests of the Church of England denounce the Roman Catholics? It is so very easy to fume and bluster against Puseyites and Papists; but the moment our charity begins at home, and we give our Evangelical brethren the same benefit which they confer upon the open Romanists, they are incensed beyond measure. Yet will we tell them to their faces, that they, despite their fair speeches, are as guilty as those whom they denounce; for there is as much Popery in this priest-making as in any passage in the mass-book. Protestant England! wilt thou long tolerate this blasphemy? Land of Wiclif, birthplace of the martyrs of Smithfield, is this long to be borne with? I am clear of this matter before the Most High, or hope to be, ere I sleep in the grave; and having once sounded the trumpet, it hall ring till my lips are dumb. Do you tell me it is no business of mine? Is it not the National Church?—does not its sin rest, therefore, upon every man and woman in the nation, Dissenter and Churchman, who does not shake himself from it by open disavowal? I am not meddling with anybody else's church; but the church that claims me as a parishioner would compel me, if it could, to pay its church rates, and that does take from me my share of tithe every year. I ask the sturdy Protestants of England, and especially the laity of the Church of England, whether they intend forever to foster such abominations? Arise, Britannia! nation of the free, and shake thy garments from the dust of this hoary superstition; and as for thee, O Church of England! may God bless thee with ministers who will sooner come forth to poverty and shame than pervert or assist in perverting the Word of God.

6. I have not quite done: I have another question to ask. Look at the thanksgiving which is offered on the twentieth day of June, on account of Her Majesty's accession: in this thanksgiving we very heartily join, although we decline to pray by book on the twentieth of June or any other day; look at the close that thanksgiving, and you see the name of Lord John Russell as a sort of official authority for the prayer! Is Earl Russell also among the prophets? And on the other side of the page, in order that the Tories may edify the church as well as the Whigs, I see the hand of S. H. Walpole. Is he also a governor in Christ's

church? Hath the Lord given these men power to legislate for his church, or sign mandates for her to obey? But what is it all about? "Victoria Regina, our will and pleasure is that these four forms of prayer," etc. Do you see? here is royal supremacy! Further on, in the next page: "Now, therefore, our will and pleasure is," etc. See the Preface to the Articles, "Being by God's Ordinance, according to our just Title, Defender of the Faith, and Supreme Governor of the Church, within these our Dominions;" and again, "We are Supreme Governor of the Church of England." This is the way in which your Church bows herself before the kingdoms of this world. I demand, earnestly demand, a "Thus saith the Lord" for this royal supremacy. If any king, or queen, or emperor shall say, in any Christian church, "Our will and pleasure is," we reply, "We have another King,—one Jesus." As to the Queen, honored and beloved as she is, she is by her sex incapacitated for ruling in the church. Paul decides that point by his plain precept, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence;" and if a king were in the case, we should say, "We render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's." In civil matters, we cheerfully obey princes and magistrates; but if any king, queen, emperor, or what not, usurps power in the church of God, we reply, "One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren. The crown-rights belong to King Jesus: he alone is King in Zion." But I am met at once with the reply, "Well, but Christ is the Head of the Established Church, as well as the Queen." I remember reading about a three-headed dog which kept the gates of hell, but I never dreamed of a two-headed church till I heard of the Anglican Establishment. A two-headed church is a monster! The Queen the Head of the Church, and King Jesus the Head of the Church, too! Never. Where is a "Thus saith the Lord" for this? No man living who calls himself an Englishman has a word to say of Her Majesty except that which is full of honor and esteem and loyal affection; but the moment we come to talk about the church of Christ, whoever shall say, or think, or believe, that there is any headship to the church of Christ except the person of Christ himself, he knoweth not what he saith nor whereof he affirmeth. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head over all things to his church, which is his body: the fulness of him filleth all in all. Here stand the two letters "V. R." at the top of certain mandates, and they mean just this: "Our royal authority commands that you shall not believe this, and you shall believe that; you shall not pray this, and you shall pray that; and you shall pray on such a day," and so on. The church which thus bows to authority commits fornication with the kings of the earth, and virtually renounces her allegiance to Christ to gain the filthy lucre of state endowments. He is the freeman whom the truth makes free, and who wears no gilded collar, with a chain hanging therefrom held in a royal hand. Remember how the Chancellor laughed to scorn the whole bench of bishops, and rightly so; for he who voluntarily makes himself a bondman deserves to feel the lash. May the little finger of our state grow heavier than the loins of James or Elizabeth, until all good men flee from the house of bondage. Servants of God, will ye be servants of man? Ye who profess to follow King Jesus and see him crowned with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, do you take off his diadem to put it upon the head of another? No, it shall never be. Scotland has repelled the royal intrusion right bravely by her sons of the Free Church, who have left all to follow King Jesus. Her bush burned in the olden times, but was not consumed; the covenant was stained with blood, but it was never slain. Let us revive that covenant, and, if need be, seal it with our blood. Let the Church of England have what king she pleases, or what prince she pleases for her head; but this I know, that there is no "Thus saith the Lord" concerning the ecclesiastical supremacy of Victoria Regina, nor the authority of Lord John Russell, or S. H. Walpole, or any of that company, honorable though they be.

7. Now once more: one other question. I am profoundly ignorant, and have not the power to judge of these things (so am I informed), and therefore I would like to ask for a "Thus saith the Lord" for a few of the canons;—no, perhaps I had better not read them; they are too bad,—they are full of all malice and uncharitableness, and everything that cometh of the foul fiend. I will ask whether there can be found any

“Thus saith the Lord” for this: Canon 10. “Maintainers of Schismatics in the Church of England to be censured. Whoever shall hereafter affirm that such ministers as refuse to subscribe to the form and manner of God’s worship in the Church of England, prescribed in the Communion-Book, and their adherents, may truly take unto them the name of another church not established by law, and dare presume to publish it, that this their pretended church hath of long time groaned under the burden of certain grievances imposed upon it, and upon the members thereof before mentioned, by the Church of England, and the orders and constitutions therein by law established, let them be excommunicated, and not restored until they repent and publicly revoke such their wicked errors.” What Scripture warrants one church to excommunicate another merely for being a church, and complaining of undoubted grievances?

Canon 11. “Maintainers of Conventicles censured. Whosoever shall hereafter affirm or maintain that there are within this realm other meetings, assemblies, or congregations of the king’s born subjects, than such as by the laws of this land are held and allowed, which may rightly challenge to themselves the name of true and lawful churches, let him be excommunicated, and not restored but by the Archbishop, after his repentance and public revocation of such his wicked errors.” Where doth Holy Scripture authorize the excommunication of every good man who is charitable enough to believe that there are other churches beside his own? Search ye out of to book of the Lord, and read!

For very much in this Book of Canons I beg to be informed of a “Thus saith the Lord.” For matters which do not concern religion and have only to do with the mere arrangement of service, we neither ask nor expect a divine precept; but upon vital points of doctrine, ceremony, or precept, we cannot do without it. Scarcely can any document be more inconsistent with Scripture than the Book of Canons, and hence it is ever kept in the back ground, because those who know anything about it must be ashamed of it. And yet these are Canons of the Church of England,—canons which are inconsistent, many of them, with even the common rules of our own present enlightened law, let alone the Word of God. We ask a “Thus saith the Lord” for them, and we wait until a “Thus saith the Lord” shall be found to defend them.

Now some will say, why do I thus take this matter up and look into it? I have already told you the reason, dear friends. There is an opportunity for pushing another Reformation given to us just now, of which if we do not avail ourselves we shall be very guilty. Some have said, “Why not go on preaching the gospel to sinners?” I do preach the gospel to sinners, as earnestly as ever I did in my life; and there are as many conversions to God as at any former period. This is God’s work: and beware lest any of you lift a finger against it. The hand of the Lord is in this thing, and he that lives shall see it. Let us have our prayers, that good may come of this controversy, even though you may deplore it. As for anything else that you can do, it shall not turn us a hair’s-breadth from this testimony to which we feel God has called us, though it bringeth upon us every evil that flesh would shrink from. The words of Dr. Guthrie are well worth quoting here: “The servant is no better than his master; and I do believe, were we more true to God, more faithful and honest in opposing the world for its good, we should get less smoothly along the path of life, and have less reason to read with apprehension these words of Jesus: ‘Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you.’ Not less true than shrewd was the remark of a Scotch woman respecting one who, just settled in the ministry, had been borne to his pulpit amid the plaudits of all the people: ‘If he is a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, he will have all the blackguards in the parish on his head before a month is gone.’”

III. Now, to close, let me say to you, my hearers, have any of you a hope of heaven which will not stand the test of “Thus saith the Lord?” What are you resting upon? Are you resting upon something which you felt when excited at a prayer-meeting or under a sermon? Remember you will not have that excitement to bear you up in death, and the religion of excitement will not suffice in the day of judgment. Are you building

upon your own works? Are you depending upon your own feelings? Do you rely upon sacraments? Are you placing your trust upon the word of man? If so, remember that when God shakes all things he will shake these false foundations; but oh! build upon the Word of my Lord and Master; trust your soul with Jesus. Hating sin, and clinging to the great sinbearer, you shall find in him a rock of refuge which can never, never fail you; but I do conjure you, as the Lord liveth, search and try yourselves by the Word of God. No doubt there are many among us who are not built upon the Rock of Ages, and we may any of us be deceived by a mere name to live. Do, then, since the test-day must come,—since you must be weighed in the balances,—weigh yourselves now, my hearers; and let none of us go down to the chambers of destruction believing ourselves to be heirs of heaven, being all the while enemies to the Most High God. May the Lord exalt his own Word, and give us a sure inheritance in the blessings which it brings. Amen.

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