

~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:

Divine Government—the Joy of Our World

by Samuel Davies

"The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad!" Psalm 97:1

Wise and good rulers are justly accounted an extensive blessing to their subjects. In a government where wisdom sits at the helm; and where justice, tempered with clemency, holds the balance of retribution; where liberty and property are secured; where encroaching ambition is checked; where helpless innocence is protected; and where universal order is established—then, consequently, peace and happiness diffuse their streams through the land. In such a situation, every heart must rejoice, every countenance look cheerful, and every bosom glow with gratitude to the happy instruments of such extended beneficence.

But, on the other hand, "Woe to you, oh land, when your king is a child," Eccles. 10:16. That is—weak, injudicious, thoughtless and peevish. This is the denunciation of Solomon, a sage philosopher, and an opulent king, whose station, capacity, and inclination, conspired to give him the deepest skill in politics. This denunciation has been accomplished in every age. Empires have fallen, liberty has been fettered, property has been invaded, the lives of men have been arbitrarily taken away, and misery and desolation have broken in like a flood—when the government has been entrusted in the hands of tyranny, of luxury, or rashness! And the advantages of beneficial climate and soil, and all others which nature could bestow, have not been able to make the subjects happy under the baleful influence of such an administration!

It has frequently been the unhappy fate of nations to be enslaved to such rulers. But such is the unavoidable imperfection of all human governments, that when, like our own, they are managed by the best minds and hands, they are attended with many calamities, and cannot answer several valuable ends. And from both these considerations, we may infer the necessity of a divine government over the whole universe and particularly over the earth, in which we are more especially concerned. Without this supreme universal Monarch, the affairs of this world would fall into confusion; and the concerns of the next world could not be managed at all. The capacities of the wisest of men are scanty, and not equal to all the purposes of government; and hence many affairs of importance will be unavoidably misconducted; and dangerous plots and aggravated crimes may be undiscovered for lack of knowledge; or pass unpunished for lack of power.

A wise and good ruler may be diffusing among his subjects all that happiness which can result from the imperfect administration of mortals—but he may be tumbled from his throne, and his government thrown into the greatest disorder by a more powerful invader. So it is evident that even the best—ruler could not make his subjects lastingly happy, unless he were universal monarch of the globe (a province too great for any mortal) and above the reach of the ambitious power of others.

Further, human dominion cannot extend to the souls and consciences of men: civil rulers can neither know nor govern them; and yet souls and consciences must be governed and brought into subjection to the eternal laws of reason, otherwise tranquility cannot exist on earth; and especially the great purposes of true religion, which regard a future state, cannot be answered. Men are placed here on earth—to be formed by a proper education for the eternal world—for another class, and other employments; but civil rulers cannot form them for these important ends, and therefore they must be under the government of one who has access to their hearts, and can manage them as he pleases.

Deeply impressed with these and other considerations, which shall be presently mentioned, the Psalmist is transported into this reflection, "The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad!" The Psalmist seems to have the mediatorial empire of grace erected by Immanuel more immediately in view; and this indeed deserves our special notice. But no doubt he included the divine government in general, which is a just ground of universal joy; and in this latitude I shall consider the text.

People in a transport are apt to speak abruptly, and omit the particles of connection and inference usual in calm reasoning. Thus the Psalmist cries out, "The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad!" But if we reduce the passage into an argumentative form, it will stand thus, "The Lord reigns; therefore let the earth rejoice; and let the multitude of islands be glad upon this account." The earth may here signify by a usual metonymy, the rational inhabitants of the earth, who are especially concerned in the divine government.

Or, by a beautiful figurative expression, it may signify the inanimate globe of the earth—and then it intimates that the divine government is so important a blessing, that even the inanimate and senseless creation would rejoice in it, were it capable of such passions.

The islands may likewise be taken figuratively for their inhabitants, particularly the Gentiles, who resided in them; or literally for tracts of land surrounded with water.

My present design is: To illustrate this glorious truth, that Jehovah's supreme government is a just cause of universal joy. For that end I shall consider the divine government in various views, as legislative, providential, mediatorial, and judicial; and show that in each of these views—the divine government is matter of universal joy.

1. The Lord reigns upon a throne of LEGISLATION. "Let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad!" He is the one supreme LAWGIVER, James 4:12, and is perfectly qualified for that important trust. Nothing tends more to the advantage of civil society—than to have good and just laws established, according to which mankind are to conduct themselves, and according to which their rulers will deal with them. Now the supreme and universal king has enacted and published the best laws for the government of the moral world, and of the human race in particular. Let the earth then rejoice that God has clearly revealed his will to us, and not left us in inextricable perplexities about our duty to him and mankind.

Human reason, or the light of nature, gives us some intimations of the duties of morality, even in our degenerate state; and for this information we should bless God; but alas! these discoveries are very imperfect, and we need supernatural revelation to make the way of life known to us. Accordingly, the Lord has favored us with the sacred Scriptures as a supplement to the feeble light of nature; and in them we are fully "taught what is good, and what the law requires of us."

And what cause of joy is this! How painful are the anxieties that attend uncertainty about matters of duty! How distressing is a doubtful, fluctuating mind, in an affair of such tremendous importance! This, no doubt, some of you who are conscientious have had the experience of, in particular cases, when you were at a loss to apply to them the general directions in sacred Scripture.

Again, "let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad," that these laws are suitably enforced with proper sanctions. The sanctions are such as befit a God of infinite wisdom, almighty power, inexorable justice, untainted holiness, and unbounded goodness and grace! And they are such as are agreeable to the nature of reasonable creatures formed for an immortal duration.

The REWARDS of obedience in the divine legislation are not such trifling toys—as posts of honor and profit, crowns and empires—which are the highest rewards that civil rulers can promise or bestow. In the divine government, the rewards of obedience are: rational peace and serenity of mind; undaunted bravery under the frowns of adversity; a cheerful confidence in the divine guardianship under all the calamities of life; and in the future world an entire exemption from all sorrow and from sin—which is the fruitful source of all our afflictions; the possession of every good, the enjoyment of the divine presence, of the society of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. In short, the fruition of a happiness above our present wishes, and equal to our then mature and eternal faculties—and all this forever! These are the rewards of evangelical obedience, not indeed for its own sake—but upon account of the righteousness of the blessed Jesus! And if these fail to allure men to obedience, what can prevail? And how happy is it to live under a government, where virtue and true religion, which in their own nature tend to our happiness, are enforced with such resistless arguments!

On the other hand, the PENALTY annexed by the divine Lawgiver to disobedience, is proportionably dreadful. To pine and languish under the secret curse of an incensed God, which, like a contagious poison, diffuses itself through all the enjoyments of the wicked, Malachi 2:2; to sweat under the agonies of a guilty conscience in this world; and in the future world to be banished from the beatific presence of God and all the joys of heaven; to feel the anguish and remorse of guilty reflections; to burn in unquenchable fire; to consume a miserable eternity in the horrid society of malignant demons; and all this without the least rational hope; nay, without so much as a deluded hope of deliverance, or the mitigation of torture, through the revolutions of endless ages—all this is a faint representation of the penalty annexed to disobedience! And it is a penalty worthy a God to inflict, and equal to the infinite malignity of sin.

"Let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad," on account not only for the rewards of obedience to the law—but also for this tremendous penalty; for it flows not only from justice—but from goodness, as well as its promise of rewards for obedience. The penalty annexed to the law, will not be executed from a malignant

pleasure in the misery of the creature—but it is annexed from a regard to the happiness of mankind, and will be executed upon individuals for the extensive good of the whole—as well as for the honorable display of the divine purity and justice.

A penalty is primarily intended to deter men from disobedience. Now disobedience tends in its own nature, to make us miserable; it renders it impossible, in the nature of things, that we should be happy in the enjoyment of God and the employments of heaven, which are eternally and immutably contrary to sinful dispositions. Disobedience also fills us with those malignant and unruly passions which cannot but make us uneasy. Hence it follows, that, since the penalty tends to deter us from sin, and since sin naturally tends to make us miserable, therefore the penalty is a kind of gracious enclosure around the pit of misery, to keep us from falling into it! The penalty is a friendly warning not to drink poison! It is, in a word, a kind restraint upon us in our career to ruin!

Indeed—it is a blessing we could not spare; for we find, that, notwithstanding the terror of the threatening, that men will run on in sin! And with how much more horrid alacrity and infernal zeal would they continue their course—if there were no divine threatening to check and withhold them?

The earth may also rejoice for the execution of the penalty of the divine law against sin; for the conspicuous punishment of the disobedient may serve as a loud warning to all rational beings that now exist, or that may hereafter be created—not to offend against God. And thus it may be the means of preserving them in obedience, and so promote the general good. And it may be that the number of those that shall be punished, when compared to the number of reasonable beings that shall be confirmed in holiness and happiness by observing their doom—may bear no more proportion, than the number of criminals executed in a government, as public example does to all the subjects of it; and consequently such divine punishment may be vindicated on the same principles.

Farther, Justice is an amiable attribute in itself, and it appears so to all rational beings but criminals, whose interest it is, that it should not be displayed. And therefore the infliction of just punishment should be matter of general joy, since it is amiable in itself. So it is in human governments; while we are innocent—we approve of the conduct of our magistrates in inflicting capital punishment upon notorious malefactors, though the malefactors themselves view it with horror.

But to proceed: "Let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad," that the divine laws reach the inner man, and have power upon the hearts and consciences of men. Human laws can only regulate our external conduct at best—but the heart in the meantime may be disloyal and wicked! Now this defect is supplied by the laws of the King of heaven, which are spiritual. They require a complete uniformity and self-consistency in us—so that heart and life may agree: and therefore they are wisely framed to make us entirely good.

The divine laws have also an inimitable power upon the consciences of men. Should all the world acquit us—yet we cannot acquit ourselves, when we violate them. The consciousness of a crime has made many a hardy offender sweat and agonize with remorse, though no human eye could witness to his offence! Now what cause of joy is it that these divine laws are living and powerful, and that they are attended with almighty energy, which in some measure intimidates and restrains the most audacious, and inspires the conscientious with a pious fear of offending!

2. The Lord reigns by his PROVIDENCE. "Let the earth therefore rejoice; and the multitude of islands be glad." The Providence of God is well described in our shorter Catechism: "It is his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." To particularize all the instances of providential government which may be matter of joy to the earth, would be endless; therefore I shall only mention the following: Let the earth rejoice; and the multitude of islands be glad, that the Lord reigns over the kingdoms of the earth, and manages all their affairs according to his sovereign and wise pleasure!

We sometimes hear of wars, and rumors of wars, of thrones tottering, and kingdoms falling, of the nations tumultuously raging and dashing in angry conflict, like the waves of the boisterous ocean. In such a juncture we may say, "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity. The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea—the LORD on high is mighty. Your statutes stand firm, O LORD!" Psalm 93:1-5

Sometimes the ambition of foreign power, or the encroachments of domestic tyranny, may threaten our liberties, and persecution may seem ready to discharge its artillery against the church of God; while every

pious heart trembles for the ark, lest it should be carried into the land of its enemies. But the Lord reigns! let the earth, let the church rejoice! "The eternal God is her refuge, and underneath her are the everlasting arms!" Deuteronomy 33. 27. He will overrule the various revolutions of the world for her good; and the united powers of earth and hell shall not prevail against her! Though the frame of nature should be unhinged, we may find refuge in our God.

Yet it must be owned, that the Lord for the chastisement of his people—may allow their enemies to break in upon them, and may cast them into the furnace of affliction. But let the earth rejoice, let the church be glad that the Lord reigns over her most powerful enemies, and that they are but executing his will even when they have no regard to it—but are gratifying their own ambition. They are but a rod in the hand of a tender father, who corrects—only to amend! And when he has used the rod for this gracious purpose—he will then lay it aside.

In this language the Almighty speaks of the haughty Assyrian monarch who had pushed his conquest so far and wide. Isaiah 10:5-7: "Oh Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets!" That is, "I will give him my commission, and send him against the Jews, my favorite people; because they are degenerated into a hypocritical nation, and he shall execute my orders."

"But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in mind." That is, it is far from his heart to obey my will in this expedition; but his only design is to aggrandize himself, "his purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations." And when this instrument of the divine vengeance arrogates to himself the honor of his own successes, with what just insult and disdain does the King of kings speak of him! "When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say—I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes. For he says: By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings!" "Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it?"

The design of God in these chastisements, is to purge away the iniquity of his people. And this is all the fruit of them—to take away their sin; and when this gracious design is answered, they shall be removed; "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous." Psalm 125:3.

Now what cause of universal joy is this, that one infinitely wise sits at the helm, and can steer the feeble vessel of his church through all the raging storms of this unfriendly climate, and tempestuous ocean! He may seem at times to lie asleep—but in the article of extreme danger, he will awake and still the winds and the sea with his sovereign mandate, "Peace, be still!"

Men may form powerful political schemes, and purpose their accomplishment in defiance of God, "but God frustrates the plans of the crafty, so their efforts will not succeed. He catches those who think they are wise in their own cleverness, so that their cunning schemes are thwarted." Job 5:12, 13. This was exemplified in the cause of Ahithophel, 2 Sam. 17:14. The hearts of men, yes of kings, "are in the hand of the LORD, and he turns them wherever he will." Proverbs 21:1, (see also chapter 16:1, 9, and 19:21.)

And how joyful a thought is this—that we are not at the arbitrary disposal of our fellow mortals, and that our affairs are not managed according to their capricious pleasure—but that "our God is in heaven, and he does whatever he pleases!" Psalm 115:3.

Again, the church may be endangered by internal divisions and offences. The professors of religion may stumble and fall, and so wound the hearts of the friends of Zion, and give matter of triumph and insult to its enemies. Some may apostatize, and return like the dog to his vomit. A general lukewarmness may diffuse itself through the church, and even those who retain their integrity in the main, may feel the contagion. Divisions and animosities may be inflamed, mutual love may be extinguished, and a spirit of discord succeed in its place. A most melancholy case this, and too much like our own—and our hearts sink at times beneath the burden! "But the LORD reigns; let the earth be glad!" He can reduce this confusion into order, and make the wrath of man to praise him, and restrain the remainder of it! Psalm 76:10.

It is the peculiarity of divine wisdom—to educe good out of evil, and let us rejoice in it. God is supreme, and therefore can control all the wicked passions of the mind. He has all power—and can rekindle the languishing flame of devotion. And oh let us apply to him with the most vigorous and unwearied importunity for so necessary a blessing!

Again, we are exposed to numberless accidental and unforeseen dangers, which we can neither prevent nor counter. Sickness and death may proceed from a thousand unsuspected causes. Our friends, our estates, and, in short, all our earthly enjoyments—may be torn from us by a variety of accidents. We walk, as it were, in the dark, and may tread on remediless dangers before we are aware.

But the LORD reigns! Let the earth be glad! contingent events are at his disposal, and necessity at his control. The smallest things are not beneath the notice of his providence, and the greatest are not above it. Those diseases and misfortunes which seem to happen by chance—are commissioned by the Lord of all! And those which result evidently from natural causes—are sent by his almighty will. He says to one, "Go!" and it goes; and to another, "Come!" and it comes! He orders the devastations that are made by the most raging elements. If flames lay our houses in ashes—they are kindled by his breath. If hurricanes sweep through our land, and carry desolation along with them—they but perform his will, and can do nothing beyond it! His hand hurls the thunder, and directs it where to strike! An arrow or a bullet shot at a venture in the heat of battle—is carried to its mark by divine direction!

How wretched a world would this be—were it not under the wise management of divine Providence! If 'chance' or 'blind fate' were its rulers—what desolation would crowd upon us every moment! We would soon be crushed in the ruins of a fallen world. Every wind that blows—might blast us with death! And fire and water would mingle in a blended chaos, and bury us in their destruction!

But so extensive is the care of Providence, that even the sparrows may find safety in it! And we cannot lose so much as a hair of our heads, without God's permission! Matthew 10:29-31. And how much more then, are we and our affairs of importance, under his guardianship and direction!

Again, we are in perpetual danger from the malignant agency of infernal spirits, who watch all opportunities to ruin the souls, bodies, and estates of men. These subtle malignant spirits can inject ensnaring thoughts into our minds, and present such images to the imagination as may allure the soul to sin. This is repeatedly asserted in Scripture, and attested by the melancholy experience of multitudes in all ages. That they also have power in the material world, to raise storms and tempests, and to ruin men's estates and inflict diseases on their bodies—is plain from the case of Job. Many in our Savior's time were also afflicted from 'the prince of the power of the air;' and his associates spiritual wickedness in high places. And what horrid devastations would these powerful and malicious beings spread through the world—if they were not under the control of divine Providence! They would perpetually haunt our minds with ensnaring or terrifying images; would meet us with temptations at every turn, and lead us as willing captives—to hell! They would also strip us entirely of all temporal enjoyments, torture our bodies with grievous pains, or moulder them into dust with consuming and loathsome diseases.

But the LORD reigns; let the earth be glad!! He keeps the infernal lions in chains, and restrains their rage! He sees all their subtle plots and machinations against his feeble sheep—and baffles them all. He will not allow his people to be tempted above what they are able to bear; but with the temptation will also make a way to escape; 1 Corinthians 10:13. And when he allows them to be buffeted—his grace shall be sufficient for them. 2 Corinthians 12:7, 9.

God has also (as Satan himself confessed with regard to Job) made a hedge about us, about our houses, and about all that we have on every side; Job 1:10; and hence we live and enjoy the blessings of life. What cause of grateful joy is this!

Who would not rather die—than live in a world ungoverned by divine Providence? This earth would soon be turned into a hell, if the infernal armies were let loose upon it.

3. The Lord reigns upon a throne of GRACE! "Let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad!" It is the mediatorial government of the Messiah, which the Psalmist had more immediately in view; and this is the principal cause of joy to the earth and its guilty inhabitants. This is a kind of government peculiar to the human race; the holy angels do not need it, and the fallen angels are not favored with it. This is invested in the person of Immanuel, "who is made head over all things to his church," Ephesians 1:22; "to whom all power in heaven and earth is given," Matthew 11:27, and 28:18. This is the kingdom described in such magnificent language in Dan. 2:44, 45, and 7:14; Luke 1:32-33. Hence that Jesus who was mocked with a crown of thorns, and condemned as a criminal at Pilate's bar, wears on his vesture and on his thigh this majestic inscription, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS!" Revelation 19:16.

And behold, I bring you glad tidings; this kingdom of God has come unto you, and you are called to become its subjects, and share in its blessings. Wherever the gospel is preached, there Jehovah sits upon a mercy-seat in majesty tempered with condescending grace. From thence he invites rebels who had rejected his government, to return to their allegiance; and passes an act of grace upon all who comply with the invitation. To his throne of grace he invites all to come, and offers them the richest blessings. From thence he publishes peace on earth, and good will towards men. From thence he offers pardon to all who will submit to his government, and renounce their sins—those weapons of rebellion. From thence he distributes the influences of his Spirit to subdue obstinate hearts into cheerful submission, to support his subjects under every burden, and furnish them with strength for the spiritual warfare. He subdues their rebellious corruptions, animates their languishing graces, and protects them from their spiritual enemies!

He enacts laws for the regulation of his church, appoints ordinances for her edification, and qualifies ministers to dispense them. He has ascended up on high; he has received gifts for men; and these he has distributed, and given: "some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers—for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12.

How happy are we, who we live under the mediatorial administration! under the empire of grace! "Let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad upon this account!" And let us pray that all nations may become the willing subjects of our gracious Sovereign.

If this administration of grace had not yet been erected, in what a miserable situation should we have been! guilty, miserable, and hopeless! Let us rejoice that the King of heaven, from whom we had revolted, has not allowed us to perish without remedy in our sinful rebellion—but holds out his scepter of grace to us—that we may touch it and live

4. And lastly, the Lord will reign before long—upon a throne of universal JUDGMENT, conspicuous to the assembled universe! "Let the earth therefore rejoice, and the multitude of islands be glad!" Here I may borrow the inimitable language of the Psalmist, "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the LORD, for he comes—he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth!" Psalm 96:10-13

This will indeed be a day of insupportable terror to his enemies, "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks—Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:15-17

But, on many accounts, it will prove a day of joy and triumph. This day will unfold all the mysteries of divine Providence, which are now unsearchable. There are many troubling dispensations, now for which we cannot account. Many blessings are bestowed, many calamities fall, and many events happen—of which mortals cannot see the reason. Prosperity is the lot of some who seem the peculiar objects of divine vengeance; and many groan under afflictions—who seem more proper objects of providential beneficence. We are often led into ways, the end of which we cannot see, and are bewildered in various perplexities about the designs of divine Providence towards us!

Hence also impiety takes occasion to cavil at the ways of God—as not just, and to censure his government as weakly administered. But in that day—all his ways will appear to be just and righteous. The clouds and darkness which now surround them will vanish—and the beams of wisdom, goodness, and justice, shall shine illustrious before the whole universe, and every creature shall join the plaudit, "He has done all things well!"

Now we can at best, but see a few links in the chain of providence—but then we shall see it all entire and complete! Then the whole system will be exposed to view at once, which will unveil the mysterious symmetry, connections, dependencies, and references of all the parts; without which we can no more judge of the excellency of the procedure than a plow-boy could tell the use of the several parts of a watch, if he saw them scattered in various places. Let the earth therefore be glad in expectation of this glorious discovery!

Again, let the earth rejoice that in that day, the present unequal distributions of Providence will be forever adjusted, and regulated according to the strictest justice. This present world is not the place or season for final

retribution, and therefore we need not be surprised that the blessings and calamities of this life are not disposed according to men's real characters! But then—every man shall be dealt with according to his works. Oppressed innocence will be redressed—and insolence forever mortified! Calumny will be confuted—and flattery exposed! Lazarus shall be comforted—and Dives tormented! Impious kings shall be driven into the infernal pit—while pious beggars shall be advanced to the heights of happiness! In short, all matters will then be set right! Therefore let the earth rejoice!

Again, let the earth rejoice, that in that day the righteous shall be completely delivered from all sin and sorrow, and advanced to the perfection of heavenly happiness! Then they shall enter upon the full fruition of that bliss, which is now the object of all their anxious hopes and earnest labors!

But we must change the scene into tragedy—and take a view of the trembling criminals hearing their dreadful doom, and sinking to hell with horrible anguish! And must the earth rejoice in this too? Yes—but with a solemn tremendous joy. Even the condemnation and everlasting misery of the ungodly—is right and just, is amiable and glorious; and God, angels and saints, will at the great day rejoice in it. The solemn grandeur of justice will be illustrated in it; and this is matter of joy. The punishment of irreclaimable impenitents will be an effectual warning to all reasonable beings, and to all future creations—that by it, they will be deterred from disobedience; and this is the cause of joy.

These criminals will then be beyond repentance and reformation, and therefore it is impossible in the nature of things, that they should be happy. And why then should heaven be encumbered with them? Is it not cause of joy—that they should be confined in prison—who have made themselves unfit for society?

In the present state, the ungodly are objects of our compassion and sorrow, and the whole creation mourns for them. Romans 8:22. But God will then rejoice in their ruin, and laugh at their calamity, Proverbs 1:26; and all holy creatures will join in his joy. Thus you see that the Lord reigns!

And who, poor feeble saints, WHO is this that sustains this universal government, and rules the whole creation according to his good pleasure? It is your Father, your Savior, your Friend! It is he who entertains a tenderer regard for you—than ever glowed in a human heart! And can you be so foolish as to regard the fears of unbelief? Can you force yourselves to fear that he will ever leave or forsake you? Can you suspect that he will allow you to fall a helpless prey to your enemies? No! Your Lord reigns, therefore rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord always! And again I say—rejoice!

While your heavenly Father keeps the throne of the universe, you shall be safe and happy. Your Father is greater than all, and none can pluck you out of his hands. Remember, he sits upon a throne of grace, therefore come to him with boldness. You may smile at calamity and confusion, and rejoice amid the ruins of the world! You may borrow the language of David in Psalm 45, "Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness!"

You may say, like Habakkuk, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

Remember also, that, as he is a king—he demands your cheerful obedience; therefore make his service the business of your life.

And, unhappy sinners! let me ask you, "Who is this that reigns King of the universe?" Why, it is he whom you have rejected from being King over you! He is the one against whom you have rebelled, and who is therefore your just enemy. And are you able to make good your cause against him—who has universal nature at his nod? How dreadful is your situation! That which may make the earth rejoice—may make you fear and tremble! The Lord reigns—let sinners tremble! You must fall before him, if you will not cheerfully submit to his government.

Let me therefore renew the usual neglected declaration, "He sits upon a throne of grace." Let me once more in his name proclaim "reconciliation! reconciliation!!" in your ears, and invite you to return to your allegiance. Lay down your arms, forsake your sins! Hasten, hasten to him! The sword of his justice now hangs over your heads—while I am managing the treaty with you! Therefore, do not delay! Yield! Yield—or die! Surrender—or perish! for you have no other alternative. Submit, and you may join the general joy at his government.

Divine Government—the Joy of Our World

You upon earth, and devils and damned in hell—are the only beings that are sorry for it; but upon your submission, your sorrow shall be turned into joy, and you shall exult when the LORD of all "comes to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."