

THE GREAT SUPREME

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A SERMON
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 AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

“Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”
Deuteronomy 32:3

OUR God is one God. He is none other than the infinite JEHOVAH, who of old spoke unto His people, and revealed Himself by that marvelous incommunicable name—the name JEHOVAH! And yet though He is one God, we are taught in Scripture that He is one God in three most glorious persons. While we rightly believe in the unity of the Godhead, and are so far Unitarians, we believe there are three persons in one God, and thus we are Trinitarian Unitarians.

We believe that the Father is God, and we ascribe unto Him greatness, for we believe that He made the world and settled the pillars thereof; that He fashioned the universe, and that He moves the starry orbs through space. We look up to the wondrous depths of a shoreless night, and we see the starry fleet sailing along, and we believe that God is their Captain.

We look further still, and as by the aid of science we discover the void illimitable, we believe that God dwells there, and is the infinite Creator and preserver of all things that exist and subsist. We ascribe greatness unto Him, the Creator and the Protector of the world.

We equally believe that Jesus Christ, who was one incarnate in the flesh, is very God of very God. We conceive the work of our redemption to be as divine a work as that of creation. We consider that the miracles He did partly furnish us with the abundant proofs that He must have been none other than God.

We behold Him rising by His own might from the tomb. We see Him standing at the right hand of God, making intercession for us. We expect with joy His second coming. We look forward to the day of judgment, wherein He shall hold the great Assize of nations. And for these reasons, believing Him to be God, we ascribe greatness unto Jesus Christ, the Surety of the better covenant.

And as for the Holy Spirit, believing that the work of conversion is as great as even that of redemption, or creation, we believe Him to be the everlasting God. We see Him so described in Scripture that we dare not speak of Him as an influence, as a new emanation from the Deity, but we conceive Him to be a person as very God of very God, as is the Father, so is the Son.

We solemnly subscribe to the creed of St. Athanasius, that though there are not three Gods, but one God, yet, there are three persons in the glorious Trinity in unity of the everlasting JEHOVAH, unto whom belong the shouts of the universe, the songs of angels, and the ascription of our united praise. Our God, then, is to be understood as Father, Son, Holy Ghost! one God whom we adore—and the words of Moses apply to the God of Christians as well as to the God of Jews—“Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

I shall use the text, first, *as a caution*. Secondly, *as a command*. I shall be but brief upon each particular, for my strength I feel may speedily fail me, but I trust in God to make some impressions on our hearts.

I. First, then, I shall use it as A CAUTION.

Inasmuch as Moses has said, “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God,” we believe that he intended thereby to hint to us that we ought to ascribe greatness to none else. If greatness is to be ascribed to God, then none of God’s creatures may in the least share the honor of that mighty attribute of greatness. Now as there are many who violate this truth and need this caution, they must allow me, if any of them are here, to caution them.

First, then, the man who trusts his salvation in the least degree to priests or pope, or any dignitary of any church, violates this great command—"Ascribe ye greatness unto our God." If I bow my knee before a saint, if I worship a created being, if I seek the intercession of any save the one person who is ordained to be the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, I do in that degree derogate from the greatness of God.

Some think not. They suppose that by using some influence with the Virgin Mary, or with the saints, these may be induced also to plead with God. Nay, they consider it to be honorable to employ some ambassador, seeing they conceive themselves to be unworthy to go to God with their own suit, and do not think Christ to be an all-sufficient Mediator to go for them.

Now to such we reply that, however humble they may think it on their part, however they may really and honestly suppose that they are magnifying God Himself, it becomes them to know this—that they are not doing homage to His greatness.

In supposing that a saint is more merciful than God, I derogate from God's mercy. In imagining that a saint shall have more influence with God than His own Son, I suppose that His heart is not tender enough to be open to my cry without the use of influence—which is to say the very least of it—throwing some slur on the infinity of His mercy, and detracting in no small degree from the kindness of His grace.

God has one Mediator, because man needed it. He has no more mediators, because neither God nor man requires any. Christ is all-sufficient. You do need a Mediator between yourselves and God, but you need none between yourselves and Christ. You may go to Christ just as you are, with all your filthiness, with all your sins, for He came to save you from what you now are, and to make you a people for Himself who should show forth His praise. Detract not then from the glory of His grace by bowing down before others and asking them to intercede for you.

I remember a singular anecdote which sets out very clearly the absurdity of the intercession of the saints. Some of you may have heard it before, but as many of you may not, I will tell it you again. A good English farmer had a landlord who resided in Ireland. On a sudden, the bailiff raised his rent so tremendously that the poor farmer could by no means pay his way and was getting entirely ruined.

He therefore applied to the bailiff to have the rent taken down to a fair average. After applying scores of times, he got no answer and he was very near destruction. He applied to other persons whom he supposed to have influence with his landlord. but he made no way at all, and was as ill-treated as before.

So doing what he had quite a right to do, he just goes over to Ireland and called to see his lordship of whom he had taken the farm. He was shown in to him, and explained that he had taken the farm at a rent which he held to be fair to himself and to his landlord, and that then he had made a living, but that on a sudden the bailiff unaccountably raised the rent, so that he was nearly ruined.

"My good friend," said the landlord, "why did you not come before? I don't wish that any man should be ruined through me. Let the rent be taken down to anything you think fair." "But," said the man, "I spoke to your bailiff. I did not dare to come to speak to a gentleman like you." "Oh," he said, "farmer, you are very welcome."

But before the farmer left, he took him to see a chapel where there were all sorts of pictures. The farmer was rather startled and asked to know what they meant. "Why," said the landlord, "these are the priests and these are the saints. I put up my prayers to them and then they intercede with Jesus Christ on my behalf."

The farmer laughed. The landlord asked him why and wherefore. Said he, "I was thinking it would be a pretty bit of business. It would be doing very much the same as I did. I went round to your bailiff, and to your friends, and I never got any redress till I came to yourself, sir. So you may go round to all these very fine ladies and gentlemen you call saints, and I believe you will never get much from them, till you go to the Lord Himself and present your petition direct to Him. But if you do, I believe you will have a very good chance of success."

This was a singular British-like mode of illustration, but it was sufficient I think to put aside the idea of going to saints in order to intercede with God. The fact of worshipping saints, of trusting my salvation in the hands of men, and thinking that any persons can forgive my sins, is to my soul abhorrent beyond abhorrence and hideous beyond horror. We should “ascribe greatness to our God”—to Him and Him alone.

Very possibly, however, what I have said of that matter will be agreed to by all of you and the arrow will fly into other breasts than yours. Allow me, therefore, to make the remark that in Protestant countries there is a very strong tendency to priest-craft still. Though we do not bow down and worship images, and do not professedly put our souls into the hands of priests, yet, I am sorry to say it, there is scarcely a congregation that is free from that error of ascribing greatness to their minister.

If souls are converted, how very prone we are to think there is something marvelous in the man. And if saints are fed and satisfied with marrow and fatness, how prone we are to suppose that the preacher has something about him by which these wondrous things are done. And if a revival takes place in any part of the vineyard, it matters not in what denomination, there is an aptness in the human mind to ascribe some part of the glory and the praise to the mere human agency.

Oh, beloved, I am sure every right-minded minister will scorn the thought. We are but your servants for Christ’s sake. We speak to you, as God helps us, what we believe to be God’s truth—but ascribe not to us any honor or any glory. If by aught a soul is saved, God from first to last has done it. If your souls are fed, thank the Master.

Be respectful and grateful to the servant as you will be, but most of all thank Him who puts the word into the mouths of His servants and who applies it to your heart. “Oh, down with priest-craft!” Even I myself must down with it. “Down with it!” I cry. If I myself like Samson fall beneath its roof, let me fall myself and be crushed, well-content in having pulled down or contributed to remove one solitary brick in that colossal house of Satan. Take care, friends, that you put no honor upon any man that you ought to have ascribed unto his sovereign. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

There is, too, in our land of freedom, somewhat of a tendency to ascribe greatness to kings and mighty men. We are most of us professedly democrats. We generally talk democratically when we get together. But there is not an Englishman that is much of a democrat after all. When we get by a noble lord, how we do look up to him, as if he were some angel come down from on high. How we defer to the man who bears a title, and whatever he might state, we should have scarcely the honesty to tell him the truth, because he added, “Duke,” or, “Lord,” to his name.

Why, my friends, in this world we seldom judge men as to character—we judge them as to rank. The poor and honest man goes through the streets—will you crowd to see him? A man shall wear a crown who is a perjurer—and will you not rush out and clap your hands at him? You judge according to rank and not according to character.

Would God we all knew how to judge men, not according to the sight of our eyes or the hearing of our ears, but according to the rightness of their characters. Oh, honor the Queen. God has said so in his Word. Pay deference unto authorities as you should do. But if in aught they swerve, remember your knee must bow to God and to God alone. If in aught there be anything wrong, though it should have a sovereign’s name attached to it, remember one is your Master, one is your King, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Ascribe not greatness unto emperors and monarchs—“Ascribe yoe greatness unto our God,” and unto our God alone.

In the case of those who are in the employ of masters, it is but just and right that they should render unto their masters that which is their due. But when the master commands that which is wrong, allow me solemnly to caution you against giving to him anything which you are not bound to do. Your master tells you, you must break the Sabbath. You do it because he is your master—you have violated this command, for it is said, “Ascribe ye greatness unto God.”

You are tempted in your employment to commit a fault. You are commanded to do it. You are irresolute. You waver for a moment—you say, shall I obey God or man? At last, you say, “My master

said so, I must obey him, or I shall lose my employment.” Remember, you have not ascribed greatness unto God when you say that.

Rather say this—“In all things that are right, I am the servant of all men, but in things that are wrong, I will not yield. I will stand up steadfast for God’s right and for God’s commands. Men may be my masters when they tell me to do the thing that is honest, and the thing that is just, but if in aught they swerve from that, I will not break my heavenly Master’s command. He is more my Master than they—I will stand firm and fast by Him.”

How many young men are tempted from the path they ought to pursue by those who exercise influence upon them! How many a young woman has been turned aside from uprightness by some command which has been given her by a person who had influence over her? Take care that you allow no man to get dominion over your conscience.

Remember, you will have no excuse at the day of judgment. It will be no palliation of your guilt to say that you were commanded by man to do wrong. For God will reply to you—“I told you to ascribe greatness to Me, and to Me only, and inasmuch as you obeyed man rather than God, you have violated My command.” “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” Take that caution—believe it—and receive it in your daily life, and in your dealing with great and small.

This text has a bearing upon certain philosophic creeds which I will just hint at here. Some men, instead of ascribing greatness to God, ascribe greatness to the laws of nature, and to certain powers and forces which they believe govern the universe. They look up on high. Their eyes sees the marvelous orbs walking in their mystery along the sky.

They take the telescope and peer into the distance, and they see yet more marvelous orbs, some of them of fire and others of a structure they cannot understand. And they say, “What stupendous laws are those which govern the universe!” And you will see in their writings that they ascribe everything to law and nothing to God.

Now, all this is wrong. Law without God is nothing. God puts force into law, and if God acts by laws in the government of the material universe, it is still the force of God which moves the worlds along and keeps them in their places. Law without God is nullity. Reject every philosophy that does not ascribe greatness to God, for there is a worm at the root of it. There is some cancer at its heart and it yet shall be destroyed. That and that alone shall stand which ascribes “greatness unto our God.”

II. So far by way of caution. Now, by way of COMMAND. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

This command comes to the sinner when he first begins seriously to consider his position before God. My friend, you have never thought of heaven or of hell until this moment, except it be a casual thought which is offensive to you. You are now in God’s house, and peradventure you are inclined to think of your own position. Remember you that you are standing upon a narrow neck of land twixt two unbounded seas—that

*“A point of time, a moment’s space
May land thee in yon heavenly place.
Or shut thee up in hell.”*

I hope you are asking yourself, “How can I be saved?” I beseech you in the very outset of that question take this for your guide—“Ascribe greatness to our God.” By this I mean when you look at your sins, ascribe greatness to God’s justice. Do not do as some who say, “It is true, I have rebelled against God, but then very likely He will not punish me.”

Be not as some who suppose that God’s justice is such a thing of willow that it can easily bend to justify without satisfaction, and pardon without atonement. Remember this, as undoubted truth, that our God is very great in justice. Solemnly I assure you from God’s holy Word that He is just, that He will by no means clear the guilty, unless they are cleared by Jesus Christ.

If you have sinned but one sin, God will punish you for it. If you have sinned but one hour, that one hour will damn your soul despite all your repentance and all your good works—unless the blood of Jesus Christ shall take your sins away. Remember, God cannot pass by sin without expressing His displeasure, and either on your shoulders, or else on those of Christ, the lash must fall—for fall somewhere it must.

God must chastise every sin. He must punish every crime. And unless you have confidence that Christ suffered for you—remember He is very great—the whole of His wrath, every drop of the shower of His anger must fall on your poor helpless head, and every word of His awful curse must sink deep into your inmost bowels.

He is a very great God. He is not like the little kings of earth who sometimes pass by sin without punishment. But He is severely just and strict towards all offenders. He says, “I *will* punish you for your sin.” “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” Start with that then when you begin to think of being saved.

Next to this, addressing the sinner who is already convinced of this sad and solemn thought, let me say, “Ascribe greatness unto our God”—that is, to His mercy. My friend, you are sensible that you are guilty. Conscience has had its work with your soul. You are certain that if God be just, He must punish you. You are well-aware He cannot pass by your iniquities without exhibiting His wrath concerning them.

Mayhap, under a sense of guilt you will cry, “My sins are too great to be pardoned.” Stop! Stop! Put Jesus Christ’s blood upon them, and my life for you, my soul for you, they are not too great. Instead of ascribing greatness to your sin, ascribe greatness to our God. Remember, if in coming to God as a penitent, you do think that His mercy is little, you do dishonor Him. I

If you suppose that the blood of Christ is not capable of washing out your blackest crime, you do so far dishonor the glorious atonement of Christ. Whenever you doubt, you defraud God of His honor, for remember He has said it, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

Come, poor sinner, and ascribe greatness to God’s mercy. Believe that His arms are wide—believe that His love is deep. Believe that His grace is broad—believe that He is all-powerful to take away your vilest sin and wash you of your crimson guilt. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” Be convinced of His great mercy, you seeking souls who want Christ and know not where to find Him.

Further, let me appeal to the Christian. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” You are in trouble, dear fellow-laborer—you are wearied with the hardness of your journey. Your poverty has got hold of you. Your troubles are multiplied and increased. It is a dark night with you just now. You see not your signs. You have no sweet promise to light upon—no cheering word to reassure your poor desponding heart.

Come, here is a text for you—“Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” Great as your troubles are, remember He is greater. If the darkness be very thick, remember the mountain stands as firm at night as in the day. And when clouds girdle His throne, yet they never shake its basement.

*“Firm as the earth His promise stands,
And He can well secure
What you commit into His hands,
Till the decisive hour.”*

Never think your trials are too huge for Him. Take them to Him. Cast them on the Lord. Trust Him with them all. His everlasting shoulders, that, like Atlas, bear the world, did never totter yet, nor shall they. Cast the whole roll of your troubles at His door—He will relieve you. Take the whole bundle of your sorrows, cast them at His feet—He can take them all away.

And when the devil tempts you to believe that God cannot help you, tell him that you think better of Him than that. You ascribe greatness to the Almighty and you believe He is great enough to deliver you from all your sorrows.

Perhaps just now, you are engaged in prayer. You have been for weeks and months agonizing at the throne. You have had but little success there. Well, as you go to the mercy seat, take this with you, “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

We often get but little from God, because we think Him a little God. We ask very little of God at times and therefore we get little. He who in prayer believes God to be great, and asks of God as if He were great, shall be certain to get many mercies from Him. Little faith gets little answers, but great faith believes God’s greatness and says,

*“I am coming to a King,
Large petitions I will bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.”*

Thus in prayer ascribe greatness unto God. Do you ask a hundred? Ask a thousand. Have you asked a thousand? Ask ten thousand. Oh! I beseech you never stint for faith, nor stint for desire. God has said, “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.”

Remember the king of Israel. The prophet came to him and gave him the bow and arrows. He said, “Shoot with the bow and arrows.” And he shot once or twice, and then he stayed his hand. And the prophet said, “Thou shouldest have shot again and again, and then thou wouldest have smitten all the Assyrians until thou hadst destroyed them.” Even so does God.

When He gives us faith, He puts the bow and arrows into our hands. Oh, do not smite once or twice. Smite many times and you shall smite your sins until you have destroyed them. Draw the long bow of prayer—shoot your arrow as far as ever you can. Ask nothing small—in small petitions, you suppose Him to be a small giver. Ask greatly and He will give greatly. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

But I hope you are today engaged in duty. You have the duty thrust upon you by Providence, which you do not flee from. Like Jonah, you are half a mind to go to Tarshish instead of going to Nineveh, for you are afraid your strength will never bear you up in so huge a labor as that which has fallen to your share.

Stop! pay not your fare to Tarshish, else winds shall pursue you. Believe this,

*“Weak as thou art,
Yet through His might,
All things thou canst perform.”*

And believing, go forward. Go forward and stop at nothing. If God should call me to break the Alps in sunder, let it please Him to give me faith. I believe He would give me strength to do it. If God were to call you, as He did Joshua, to stop the sun in its course, and seize his golden bridle, and bid his coursers stay their hasty race, you would have strength enough to do it. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

If like Luther you had to brave the Vatican and breast the storm, if God intended you for the work, He would give you grace to stand in it. And if your trial should be one of persecution, if you are called to the stake, you need not fear to march boldly to it, and embrace it—for He who called you to die will give you dying grace, will give you burning grace—so that you shall endure in the midst of hideous torments, and terrific pains. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” Yea, greatness made more great in the midst of creature weakness.

And now, to close, there is one point I wish to urge upon your attention tonight. Wherever I go it is the almost universal complaint that the former times were better than now. Everywhere it is the solemn conviction of Christians that the church is in a very wrong position. Go where you please you will hear one confession, one doleful, lamentable groan, that the church is cold and lifeless. Not dead, but Laodicean—and I believe that Laodicea is the most correct picture of the church at the present moment.

We are neither hot nor cold, and Christ is angry with us. Where is the zeal—the zeal of Whitefield? Ah, where are the men that weep for perishing sinners? Where are the ministers that weep for souls as if it were for life or death? Where are the Baxters now, whose knees shake when they climb their pulpit stairs, because they feel how solemn is their position, and whose cheeks are guttered with tears because they know the doom of perishing sinners, and long to snatch them from the fire?

Where are your Rowland Hills now, who descend to common language to reach the common people? Ay, and where are your praying men, and praying women? There are many of them—but where are those who pray with all their hearts as if they meant it? Ah, heaven knows, the church is just now where it ought not to be.

But oh! Christians, sit not down in despair. Think not that God has given us over. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.” In the very worst of times, God can bring us out again. In the times of Arius, when the world was gone aside to disbelieve the divinity of Christ, God provided an Athanasius, who in bold stern language put to flight the Arians and stood up for God.

When the world had gone aside to Pelagianism, He found an Augustine, who uttered the words of grace and delivered the world from that mesh of errors. When the church had gone into foul delusions, there was the monk found who shook the world—the Luther to proclaim the truth. And when the doctrines needed purity, there was the Calvin to cast salt into the troubled waters, and make them calm and limpid, so that to the very bottom man could see.

And when in later times, the Church of England, and the church in England had sunken very low, all men said God had given up His church. There were found six young men in the college of Oxford. God only knows how they came there and how they were converted. Those six—Wesley and Whitefield being of the number—waked the world again from its dark and long slumber.

And when we had relapsed again, God found the successors of Whitefield—the Romains, the Topladys, the John Newtons, the Rowland Hills—men like Christmas Evans, like John Berridge. These came to bear the standard of the Lord and to support His truth. And mark you now, God has got the man somewhere. Ay, the men somewhere, and they will yet come out. There will be a shaking one of these days. The men shall come yet to move the church once more.

We shall not forever sleep. We shall not forever lie still. There will be a revival throughout this land, I do believe, such as our fathers never saw. The times shall come when the heavens shall give ear and shall hear the call, and shall send down rain, when the earth shall blossom with righteousness, and the heavens shall drop with dew. For that time we all heartily pray, for the time we earnestly wait. “Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.”

To my own church and people, only one word and then farewell. My friends, we also are about to engage in an enterprise for which I fear we are not quite competent. But remember God will provide for us. Often on my bed do I toss restlessly by night to know what is to become of all these people. Where is my church to be housed and where my congregation to be gathered? And but last night in unbelief, I thought it never could be that such a place could be built. But ah! always “Ascribe ye greatness unto God.”

Let us attempt great things and we shall do great things. Let us try at them, and God being with us, we shall do them yet. If I had cared to preach in fine and gaudy language, I might perhaps have done it. But I have cared only to speak just as common people do. I often tell tales that shock propriety—I shall do it again. I often do things that others condemn me for—I shall do worse still, God helping me.

If I can but win souls by them, I am not to be daunted by any opinion whatever. If heirs of heaven are snatched from hell, I shall rejoice to have done it by any means in the world. Well, then, if I am ever to have the poor around me, then will I trust in God, in His poor, and in His church, that they will yet raise a tabernacle where His name is to be honored. Lay it to your hearts and if you think it is God’s work, go about it with faith and with vigor. “Ascribe your greatness unto our God.”

Oh! you that hate my God, oh! you that despise Him, the day is coming—perhaps tomorrow shall be the day when you shall “ascribe greatness to my God.” For you shall feel His great foot upon your loins,

and His great sword shall cut you in sunder. His great wrath shall utterly devour you, and His great hell shall be your doleful home forever.

May God grant it may not be so and may He save us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.