No. 49

The perpetuity of the xtern Church.
Matthew XXVII, 18. - "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, & when this rock I will build my church, & the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Such is the declaration of the apostle concerning the ancient Saviours of the little band of disciples, who had followed his steps, listened to his instructions. And Peter had first to this declaration this question, "When dost thou say that I the Son of man am?" They replied, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, & other Jeremias one of the prophets." "He saith unto them, But when saith that I am?" And Simon Peter answered, & said, "Thou art the one of the living God. And Jesus answered, & said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh & blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, who is in heaven. He proceeds, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, & hence in allusion to his name, wh
in the original signifies a stone; he adds, "For as the rock is
a refuge and shelter to the people of a city, so will I build my church of the gates of hell shall
not prevail against it." — Peter had seen many kinds
of the rock in the cause of his Master; & though the
widows sometimes led them the incantation, or blessed,
the Preacher knew them to be devoted to his service, & unimpeachable;
unqualified to establish the foundation, & spread the light
of his religion in different parts of the world. — There
was in him much of that energy & enthusiasm, with which
he could carry him on, and dauntless through difficulties &
dangers; yea, make him a most successful, most
impartial, most simultaneous, most impartial
martyr of the gospel. — O Lord, therefore, by way of
condemnation and reward, for the expression of devout & im-
perious truth, with His valiant disciple, be justly made
assure Him, that He should be considered a distinguished
champion in the cause of that religion, as one coming
forth, like the morning of morning light, when that
day through his instrumentality, of His labours the
church should strike deep its roots & spread over its
branches, & hold defiance to the terrors of the strength
of persecution, & the spirit of persecution might rise
around it.

The apostles in the text, who are rendered the gates
of hell, are either a figurative expression of that force
which is by the help of the church, & would encounter;
from the discord of parties, 
from triumph in the encounter; or they may be considered
as intended to signify the entrance to the inanimate
world, i.e. death. — This passage, therefore, may be
viewed as a promise from our Lord, that another
manner of persecution, & death, near the annals of death,
should ever be able to destroy or to oppress His church,
which was to be founded & supported by the labours, toils
& sufferings of His Apostles. — And the church in this
passage we are to understand the whole assembly of them
who express their parts of life in this, & who are his true
disciples; however, they may be distinguished by cliques,
religious opinions, modes of profession, or outward condi-
tion. There is but one church in heaven, & therefore
those should be but one on earth. Our Lord hath with
equal complacency in all who love & acknowledge him,
build their hopes on this religion, no matter what may
be the name, by which they have been called on earth. It is not for us to rend the seamless garment of it, to build up endowments, & draw lines of distinction in the field of our Saviour's work. We have but few bases to stand on earth, & it all becomes us to prize them in estimating other's, who profess the Gospel with as much sincerity as we do, have the same right to the blessings of the Gospel as we claim for ourselves. It is time for us to be done with elevating ourselves on the little policy distinctions, & have so long harassed the church of Christ, to acknowledge, with joy, that here is but one of them mediators between God & man. If we all build upon the same outline, & exercise promises, & are all look to the same Saviour, the same teaching.

In the text then, may we have confirmed the promise of the perpetuity of this church. And this is a promise of sustaining the value. The principles & sanctities of the Gospel, perpetuated in the true church, enlightened the understanding & sanctifying the heart, may be justly considered as the chief source of the invaluable blessings which we enjoy as individuals & members of society.

It is true, ignorance & superstition, fancied evidence, imposed force have sometimes prevailed even in the church of God; but it is enough to make the sincere often vie in bitterness of heart, to see how the light of the Gospel is sometimes obscured by the worldly passions & prejudices of its professed. But if men have polluted the stream, does it follow that the fountain is impure? If the, Gospel has not produced all those good effects at one time & place, are we to believe that it has had no influence at all? Would not the world be in a more deplorable state of ignorance & darkness, without the discoveries & commands of the Gospel, perpetuated & preserved by the institutions & ordinances of the true church? Do we not find, that the grossest errors, are the darkest superstitions maintained, the bold pretensions of influence in those countries where the light of the Gospel has not yet reached? And if men is so deceived by this passion so unaccountable, with standing all the restrictions & restraints of civilized order, we may fairly ask, what would have been the state of the world, without the knowledge & without the
advantages at our only religion affords. What the head had transmitted from age to age?

The perpetuity of the plain church is therefore an inseparable blessing: How important & valuable is the promise, that it shall endure to the end of time. The water of the sea, if we may so say at the period of this promise, to have taken the rise, & from thence, we may trace its course, ever widening, ever deepening, ever carrying the shadow of eternity to the successive generations of mankind. We have the assurance that they shall never fail. That gracious verse, “Go ye therefore, make disciples of all nations,” is the echo of our ears, & leaves us no pretext to hope that we will not taste & live.

The promise expressed in the text must have exercised a strong effect on the disciples of our Saviour, in the peculiar circumstances of the time; at which it was uttered. Men had been gradually coming to see the prospect of suffering & death, & may before him, & perhaps this meet the more filially. Heavy 

frustrating appearances, that the death of their Master would defeat all their high hopes & prospects, that his kingdom would terminate with his life; & that in

his grave they must bury all these views of nominal honour, & grandeur. How they cherished so partly & so reluctantly. What then, they might ask, would be their fate, when their Master should have them in the midst of fraud, malice, & forced enemies? Would they, so he could wish their Master to the cross, spare their disciples? If while he wavered them, they had met at every step persecution & contempt, what might they expect; when he should be removed from them by a cruel & unanimous death? The same before them might appear full of terrors & dismay; they might be inclined to turn from it with fearful & discouraging forebodings. But in the midst of these distressing apprehensions, the promise of their Master comes in to give them light. They see, therefore, how must it have animated their hearts & strengthened their hands, to be assured by the Lord, that notwithstanding all that man had done or could do, his church was founded on a rock, that the gate of the invisible world & the death of their Master would not, prevail against it. The cloud, &
being was their prospect was disposed. They would now view themselves as the agents of their Master, as the future possessed of the land and the possession of the empire of God among men. The cross to which the Jews should look the Lord of life, would not, could not, destroy, or even check, the march of the kingdom of Heaven. The promise was full of excitement and inspiration. It is as if our Saviour said to his followers: "Be not dismayed, the being and prosperity of my church do not depend on human skill or human power. The service in which you are engaged is indeed arduous and full of trials. Difficulties, obstacles, and discouragements will surround your steps. Your enemies may pursue you with a malignity, that cannot be conquered. But may the cross upon you, the truth of your testimony with your blood. You may tremble at the thought of your sacrifice, but may the hope of divine truth and the means of salvation. But remember my promise, my noblest, my trembling vote. You may safely and steadily trust the cause in which you are embalmed to the wisdom, power, and understanding of your Saviour. Untimely death may remove you from your labours, but God will raise up those who shall enlarge the boundaries of the church, spread the triumphs of the Redeemer's name. You may see your fellow labourers approved and condemned by human tribunals. But think of my promise, dwell on the future. Your sufferings and death will but promote the cause of my religion. Your blood will be the seed of my church; your labours will increase its growth. Those who have already given to their Lord a place in their hearts — 

There is another reflection, not naturally arising from the consideration of the continuance of the Christian church through successive generations: it is a strong proof of the truth and excellency of the principles on which the church is founded. Judging more by the usual calculation of success among men, no one who had seen the few, few, and apparently scattered followers of a Saint, could have supposed that from them was to spring a church, and should grow and flourish till it should become the ark of salvation to the nations of the earth. There would not suppose that twelve men, unsupported by the arm of power, by the advice of the wise and resources of influence, could
have gone forth & planted the seeds of a spiritual rev-
olution throughout the world. I wish they had not
the power & presence of the most high been with them.
And not the shield of their laws, been raised for their de-
fence, vain would have been their labours, useless their
sufferings. Paul might have planted, if he had watered,
God alone could give the increase. "Had the little flock
wh was collected together during our Saviour’s ministry,
been united only by the means whereby our
preachers imparted. how could they have spread
through the most civilized nations, where passion could have no
influence, where every shade of importunity must have
been examined & detected? What could have preserved
it warm friends & ablest partie, during the three
first centuries, after it was encomiumed & persecuted,
in their alliances with it must have been maintain-
ed at the risk, & even with the sacrifice of ease, pro-
city, & life? What could have preserved the name &
society of these to our own days, through all the revolu-
tions of time & the chances of the world? Other institu-
tions, societies have risen, flourished, & shared; or for
a time, they have withered, & already been forgotten, by
the church of it, like the ark or carried the chosen family
of the patriarch, has been safely on the waves of
sorrows, & all around in ruin. If what then are we to
derive the constancy & perpetuity of the other sects?
of that community as was first formed in Judah un-
der the direction of one, able to outward appearance was
not & have lost, for the died a death of ignominy, &
has struggled with contradictions of faction through every age?
- The answer is, the church of it was founded
on a rock. The principles of its union were solid &
sublime. It the gave the other religions to man, could
alone make out its path, through the haze of ages,
compassed his angels to watch over it, & guard it
as the sanctuary of the world. "The doctrines of
sanctuaries,
by which the existence of the church has been maintained, were derived from God. His providence has been its security of defense. Because it has been the peculiar charge of the Almighty, it continues to this day, I will continue to the end of time. - "Meaning of God's protection overshadowed it, & it rests in peace & safety."

From the promise in the text, we may draw a lesson of solemn importance to all, who sink themselves under the banners of the same church. Let them beware that they do not diminish the cause whe they have espoused, "having a stone upon the holy name, whereby they are called. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles & prophets, & Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

"You will defend the sanctuary of your faith, by making it the refuge of impurity of loving."

"Let that choose, who received the charter of its establishment from the hands of the world, which was founded by the labors cemented by the blood of the first disciples, which has been under the watchful eye of God's providence ages of ages, through various and most disastrous & perilous the most damaging, all be polluted by the vices & want by the devices of those, who have preferred a regard to its interests, & have promised to preserve its purity. Shall they, who have come to bear the ark of the Lord, lay upon it unholy hands? - When you have enrolled yourself in the society of true friends, under the patronage of the Redeemer of the world, you may find refuge from guilt, from doubt, & fear. There are the means of grace, exhaustless, as they are elevating, will turn away from this sacred enclosure, this bright asylum. While you meditate into forbidden & destructive fates, forget your fear, & bring upon the cause of the thoughts & the ridicule of the profane."

"Forbid religious facetious."

"Everywhere! Praise God for a moment. I think how beautiful it is to suppose to contemplate, then fear to neglect, that religion, which is our only refuge amidst the changes of life, the chances of time. Yet the world can repair for safety, consolation, & hope, under the trials & example their dark shades with the sunshine of our prosperity. May he profess to love his God, & yet, like demons, who claims near to him, with his life while his heart is far from them, as the traitor among the disciples, who could set at table with his master, & then go out, betraying him to his enemies. In the church of the first born in heaven, you will find no false teachers professors..."
Another reflection, on which many naturally make on the
promise of our Saviour, in the texts, is that in the course of the
enormous destructions of death, the church shall
subsequently prevail through succeeding ages. As those of
one age have been led into their graves, a new harvest has
sprung up in the next. One generation passes away &
another comes up. Though numbers are continually passing
through the gates of death, though the light & joyous
state of the church of the world are removed, yet, in the very
consummation & occasional recovery of those who have given it
subject, a seed is sown which the wisdom of grace,
theZendart have ordained a succession of such as shall
rise up & call them blessed. It is true, death in the
meantime, religious indifference on the other, destroys
some of the richest & fairest plantations in the garden of
our God. If we judge of the number of real saints
by that of outward professors, have we not reason to mourn
over the declining interests of religion? Death makes brood
upon us, one after another, until we are quite surprised, at that
dissolution of ordinances, and the disgrace of sins,
renders these breaches a subject of mournful reflection.
In the view of a perfect so discouraging, one may be ready to
exclaim, shall the gates of the invisible world ever
always prevail against the church of the Redeemer? Shall
the shadow of death, so occasionally come over the sanctuary,
even thicken in the depth of gloomy night? Shall future
generations be reduced to the scattered state of those among
whom the church of God was first planted? In these, we
have one and the same assurance, that this shall not be. The
gates of hell shall not prevail against his church; it
will be subject to vigorous declensions, but it shall
never fail & be utterly lost. It might sometimes decline;
but the heavens & earth shall pass away, before it
is destroyed. Let us remember, that it is of infinite
import, that the unbelieving &t, the unhopeful
sects of every nation will be received as the
sacred ordinances, that the name of the Redeemer shall
be known & honored from the rising to the setting sun.
This subject, often to bring before us in its connection with
ourselves, let us pause & think seriously of it. 
At the commencement of a new year we have come to commemorate
the sufferings & death of our Saviour by the ordinance of his

learn to despise them. If that of you discover them with fidelity & sincerity, nor of keeping marring your reverence for sacred institutions will hallow the experienced that too greatly be induced early to give their names to the cause of religion.

To the young I would say, the meaning of life cannot be obbliged & natural but that which it is consecrated to God, done to the table of the Lord, where his total, his failures have been before you, in which you may think of God, love & a Savior sufferings, till your hearts shall be subdued to the spirit & power of his Gospel.

He becomes us, he is, while we dwell near to celebrate the memorial of our dear ones, to think of what God through his care for us, with hearts vitally affected with sense of his mercy of his own unworthiness. To us the means of grace have been continued through another year, you are still permitted to assemble around the table of our Lord. But while communities in our doors have been accustomed to meet here, some are shall see no more in this world. They have gone to their rest, you too soon must follow them. The night comes, therefore let us dwell the day, if I may say, that we may each of us so pass the time of our sojourning here, that our ears may hereafter be gladdened with that joyous invitation.
"come ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom pre-
pared for you from the foundation of the world." Matt. 25:34

Dec. 29, 1849.
At home January 9, 1820—afternoon.
At home January 5, 1828—afternoon.